

STEREOTYPING AFRICA

SURPRISING ANSWERS TO SURPRISING QUESTIONS

EMMANUEL FRU DOH



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Stereotyping Africa

Surprising Answers to Surprising Questions

Emmanuel Fru Doh



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Dedication

To the memory of my beloved father, Pa Philip Doh Awah,
who taught me from my earliest beginnings to understand and
accept the fact that even the fingers on one hand are not the same.

TO GOD ALMIGHTY BE PRAISE AND GLORY

“My Africa is rich in human resources and dignity.... I get insulted when I see only images of our dying, our wars, our Darfur, our AIDS victims...not our doctors, our nurses, our teachers....”

Iman Abdulmajid

“The world is big. Some people are unable to comprehend that simple fact. They want the world on their own terms, its peoples just like them and their friends, its places like the manicured little patch on which they live. But this is a foolish and blind wish. Diversity is not an abnormality but the very reality of our planet. The human world manifests the same reality and will not seek our permission to celebrate itself in the magnificence of its endless varieties. Civility is a sensible attribute in this kind of world we have; narrowness of heart and mind is not.”

Chinua Achebe

“In a world that is becoming smaller and societies that are becoming multicultural, it may be time for western culture to examine itself critically in terms of its view of other cultures. For how much of western culture is made up of prejudices about other cultures, how much of western identity is constructed upon the negative identity of others? Past fears and antagonisms are encoded in images and symbols, in sayings and rationalizations, which set self and other apart, in ways which may no longer be part of our mentality but which do form part of our ambience and cultural baggage. Is it not time, then, for a spring cleaning of intercultural images, of alienating images between cultures and ‘races’ which have long since outlived their usefulness?....The legacy of several hundred years of western expansion and hegemony, manifested in racism and exoticism, continues to be recycled in western cultures in the form of stereotypical images of non-western cultures.”

Jan Nederveen Pieterse

Preface

There had been moments before when I had thought of a book on the image of Africa in the West with a certain hesitation, until the scene described below occurred. It made me change my mind. Because I realized reaching people might have to be a process, I decided on beginning with something simple such that an individual like my main character below could be interested in; hence the idea of questions and answers. This scene was the last straw that triggered me into action, and it took place in a restaurant - Bucca di Beppo – years ago in Eden Prairie, Minnesota.

“When I think of Africa, I think of huts, lions, zebras,” laughter, “no, it’s true, that’s all that comes to mind,” stuttered an acquaintance at a dinner table where I happened to be a guest.

My neighbor at the table, a noble lady of English descent, suffered from, and protested against, the remarks, but was pleasantly surprised to see me smiling instead.

“It’s alright,” I said to my neighbor, “I’m used to that by now.”

“I’m so sorry,” the sweet and gentle lady went on apologizing.

What a portrait for a continent so resource-rich, diverse, welcoming, and so potentially powerful, but unfortunately so derailed, abused, exploited, and slighted, mostly because of how the majority of those who have written about Africa have decided to present the continent for reasons as many and sundry as the countries that have taken advantage of Africa’s hospitality. It is my hope that with time that unfortunate ideological high achieved from lambasting Africa, regardless of fact and fiction, would be done with, and many of the addicts—distributors and consumers alike—would be able to move on clean for the rest of time.

This work, which addresses collected questions asked me about Africa year after year, is the product of my stay, travels, and experiences in the West, Europe and North America, the latter especially. My encounters exposed me to extremely disturbing ideas nursed by some people about the continent of Africa and Africans, especially those from south of the Sahara. Accordingly, I could not help marveling sometimes at how misled, uninformed, and even insulting—intentionally or otherwise—some Westerners have been, and still are about Africa, Africans, their plight, and their culture.

This experience usually started with a question at a gathering, but more often in class, and coming from a student of mine: “You have an accent, where are you from?” To which I usually answered back with “You have an accent, where are you from?” And then consternation furrows the student’s face as he begins questioning himself about what I meant by his having an accent since to him his accent is *the* accent. After I found out that students, more often, did not mean the question to come across the way it did, I took time to explain how they sounded, and to educate them on the fact that virtually every group of people has an accent, even Americans from the United States have an accent, to which explanation the student usually asked “You are kidding, right?” They found out I was not kidding when I went on to prove to them that even within the United States there are different accents. For example, somebody from the North does not have the same accent as a person from the South, nor do African-Americans sound like European-Americans; then it all dawned on the students. I usually went on to tell them the correct and educated thing to say is “You have a foreign accent, where are you from?” The students agreed and many other questions followed which showed they were baffled I knew “so much about America” even though I had not been in America for that long. I explained to them that in my native country, Cameroon, by the time I was out of high school, I had already mastered American and European history to my finger tips, which baffled them all the more since, to them, I was apparently busy studying something they thought ought not matter to me. I made them see why I thought they were wrong.

After having received this question about my accent and many more about Africa so many times over, it occurred to me that I had to do something: I had to write a book answering these questions otherwise for generations to come the scene will be the same. With my mind made up, when this scene presented itself again, especially in class, I usually asked after my answer, “Do you have any other surprising questions about where I am from that you want me to address, put them in writing and send them forward.” I would then spare a few minutes and answer them before going on with my class, because that is what true education is—being well informed foremost. As earlier indicated, I had these questions in whatever group situation I found myself—weddings, funerals, and so on. I

remember during the first graduation ceremony I attended on one campus as a faculty member, I had on the red doctoral robe from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, standing out conspicuously against all the other black or dark blue robes. One lady asked me what university's beautiful robe that was. I told her the University of Ibadan. When she asked me where that was, and I answered "Nigeria, Africa," she turned away abruptly as if I had slapped her in the face. Years later, a little more steeped in the culture, when I reconsidered this lady's reaction, I could not help wondering if she thought I was being sarcastic, mindful of the accepted portrait of African countries as poor and wretched: how then could an African country boast of a university with such a beautiful graduation robe?

Structurally, this work is presented as it is—questions and answers—so that one will be able to read a section at a time and return after hours, or days even, to continue without the feeling of having lost a particular train of thought. In this way, those who are very busy can read a question from time to time and ultimately finish the book while reaping virtually the same benefits as those who read the entire book in one sitting. Meanwhile, should any reader with a Western background feel insulted by any part of this work, and this has not been any desire of mine as I have worked hard at eliminating anything that could come across as an insult, then I say welcome into the world of the black person as this is how the latter has felt for centuries during which time he/she has been deliberately misrepresented and insulted by "civilized" peoples of the world. My idea has been simply to tell the truth about a part of the world that another has, for very long, struggled to represent as the laughing stock of mankind, for whatever reason. Accordingly, I was occasionally forced to draw certain parallels between cultures, but only as a way of bringing out the truth. It is also worth noting though, that sometimes different people posed questions that were apparently similar. Such questions are still addressed, their similarities notwithstanding, because it was noticed that the inquirers' focus and interest were different.

Why the word "surprising" then as a part of my title, I was asked by a student? The quest for knowledge is only a natural and foremost human exercise and so even questions engendered by a sincere desire to learn may, at times, be strange and surprising. This, however, was not exactly the nature of my encounters with those asking me

questions about Africa. Whereas many questioned me out of a genuine desire to learn the truth, even when some of the questions were embarrassing because of how ridiculously basic they were and needed no expert knowledge apparently, the word “surprising” in the title was inspired by another group, numerically significant, which asked questions in a manner which made obvious the fact that learning was not their concern. With smirks on their faces, they were out to test an established picture that is burned on their psyche, and in the process confirm their “superiority” while jibing at the cradle of mankind—Africa. The questions and the motive behind the questions of this latter group were genuinely surprising given that this is the 21st and not the 14th Century. Whatever the case, those who were genuinely interested in learning must pardon the use of this word. These questions in all—those asked in genuine search for knowledge, and those asked in an effort to insult or ridicule—nourished the inspiration that gave birth to this book. It is my hope then, that this book will educate those who have remained essentially uninformed, or worse still largely misinformed about Africa. Africa is a continent so rich, diversified, hospitable, and gifted in every way but the ability, it would seem, to harness and eradicate the confusion trusted upon her by centuries of Western invasion—socially, culturally, politically, and even militarily. The idea is for this book to tell or remind all, Westerners especially, that Africans are peoples with their own values which are in many ways different, sometimes even from one ethnic group to another, but obviously so from those of the West. Yet these values risk being totally derailed because of the West imposing the need for Africans to become “civilized” by giving up everything they have known for Western “values.”

It needs mentioning here, that one of the things found disturbing about how Africa is always presented, is that seeming craving to represent the continent, forever, as if it is one nation. Most of us wish that were the case. Alas, Africa is a huge continent with numerous peoples and diverse cultures like no other continent on earth, in spite of how others love to present it as if it were one nation. This practice is, lamentably, sometimes maintained in this effort though, simply for the purpose of clarity and the effectiveness of style, for Africa

...is such a diverse place. The local terrain, climate and ecology vary tremendously from one place to another.... The people of Africa are also more diverse, in race, tribe and culture, than on any other continent.... No place, no culture in Africa can be cited as typical of the whole continent. (Kimball)

It is easier for me to generalize now as I try to represent the whole continent, than it is for a writer writing about Somalia to say, Africa. My kind of generalization here is understandable and harmless for it is unlike that generalization characteristic of stereotyping which can be described as vicious, lazy, and with that certain guile intended at insulting. It is that kind of generalization which happens because the situation indeed exists in many more African countries, unlike when a particular case is being forced on the rest of Africa, being generalized so to say, when the particular African country could simply have been named. Aware of the misleading portraits of Africa, Westerners, especially Americans, have been fed and maintain about Africa, Armstrong Williams writes:

Let's examine what Africa is today: It is no longer 'the dark continent,' full of wild animals and wilder people, a place as foreign to us as the moon. We can no longer treat it as one country, where we can apply one-size-fits-all solution to its multiple problems. Yet we continue to ignore the fact that dozens of nations lie within it.

Africa has no single identity; no single definition can ever describe it accurately. It is a patchwork of nations, some rich, some poor, some green, some dry, each with their own set of problems and own particular promise. Most Africans differentiate themselves from one tribe or another; it is the West who willingly wears binders.

There are many out there who helped me in one way or the other with this work, but the role of a few was strategic towards its realization. To those who furnished me with these questions directly or indirectly, I remain very thankful. Let me quickly add here, however, that this volume does not pretend to have exhausted all the questions one can find out there about Africa; that

notwithstanding, it is no doubt effectively representative of what the total picture may be. I am equally indebted to those who, after reading the original manuscript, were able to offer invaluable suggestions especially those relating to my original tone. It was no easy challenge trying not to be sentimental when reacting to blatant insults to my roots generated by bias, fallacious, and frequently passionate reasoning and writing; yet, at the very worst, I thought, with regards to earlier drafts to this work, that I was only just responding naturally to damning and mostly stereotyped allegations about Africa. From these friends, I learned of the need to be “politically correct” and I hope it has paid off. Several friends reacted with disbelief that I had something else to say contrary to what some powerful newspapers had written about Africa, hence the damaging impact bias coverage of easily the world’s most friendly and hospitable people—Africans—has had on them, which made this effort pertinent. I am particularly grateful to members of my family, especially our daughter, Fiona-Emma, whose continuous reactions to misrepresentations of Africa frequently encountered at school strengthened my conviction of the need for a book of this nature. My colleagues in academia especially Patricia Pyle of Century College, Susan Taylor of Saint Paul College, Dr. Alvin L. Killough of the University of Minnesota, Crookston, and Milton Krieger, Professor Emeritus, Western Washington University read the manuscript at one point or the other and gave me useful ideas. My dear friend, Susan Sandoval, graciously went over the manuscript in all its different stages and made worthwhile suggestions. Dr. Mary M. Tjosvold of Mary T. Inc. was kind enough to introduce me to Diana Oleskow Lubich whose suggestions helped shape and tone this work. I am also thankful to all those who, from time to time, questioned me about my roots, their intentions notwithstanding—friends, students, neighbors, parishioners, and even colleagues. Those questions opened up a whole new world for me, which made this effort worthwhile even if only to point out that when a child throws stones into a tree, it is not for nothing.

It is my hope then, that after reading this book, descendants of Africa, especially those in the diaspora, will, like the young Charles King, an 8th grader from Atlanta KIPP WAYS (Knowledge Is Power

Program West Atlanta Young Scholars) Academy after a visit to Africa, declare, but now only as a historical fact, that “So many African-Americans are ignorant about Africa because of the bad that they hear, but if they saw this place they would be proud like I am of where I come from” (Chandra R. Thomas 126). Beyond descendants of Africa, I would like both the painters of strange portraits of Africa and those prone to consuming these portraits avariciously to arrive at Jonathan Power’s message to his daughter who asked him after viewing typical images of Africa in movies like “Blood Diamond,” “Last King of Scotland” and a much earlier film “Out of Africa,” if Africa is really like that. Power tells her: “... part of Africa WAS (sic) like that. Some of it, a diminishing portion of this vast continent, is still like that. But most of it never was and today it certainly is not.” Indeed, if one person can read this book and say “really?” to just one of the questions and its attendant answer, I would have earned my reward.

Part One

The Introduction: On Painting a Portrait

The portrait of Africa to the world, unfortunately, has been painted with broad strokes—prejudiced—on a canvas of natural and man-made disasters characterized by frustration, despair, blood, and pain, by propagandists in the main, as only scenes of unfortunate happenings seem to attract and delight their fancy. Accordingly, one cannot help wondering if disaster is a unique African backdrop. Make the effort to protest against these selective yet generalized portrayals of Africa and even serious men and women of letters smile and dismiss it casually with the suggestion that people know better than to believe these writers and their portraits. This, however, is not true; the vast majority of people knows very little and it is what they see on television, read in the newspapers, and hear on the radio—mostly stuff tainted by reportage—that finally amounts to their knowledge and understanding of Africa. Yet it is a people, their abode, and their values that are being thus habitually misrepresented as the information, more often than not, is de-contextualized by being often presented as the norm. This is especially troubling when one realizes that television, newspapers, magazines, and adventure books that usually carry these often “misleading” portraits are considered rather authoritative sources on Africa, south of the Sahara especially. The result today is the disbelief with which Westerners now receive facts about Africa especially as these facts, more often than not, contradict what their supposedly authoritative sources had given them to believe. It could have been as far-fetched as Africans not having seen a bottle of coke before as is depicted in the movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, or of Africans killing each other in purposeless barbaric genocidal engagements, and it was acceptable since the characters were Africans and it tied in with what the people have been groomed to love to hear about Africa. Mette Bovin had come to a similar conclusion after reading “racy reviews” (93) written by British media about the WoDaaBe of Africa after *The WoDaaBe* (1998), a film in Granada Television’s *Disappearing World* series was shown to the public for the first time. In condescending terms, British media highlighted grooming habits, to me, made different from those of English men only by English media’s exotic and patronizingly

haughty diction. Bovin agrees: "It became clear to me that in our society people are 'precoded' to only see Africa as 'exotic'" (93)¹ This unfortunate disposition towards Africa in the West, its largely unsettling and sometimes tragic consequences notwithstanding, boils down to what social scientists have termed "stereotyping." Beverly G. Hawk best illustrates this point with relation to America:

Interest in Africa waxes and wanes. Crises named Mau Mau, the Congo, Biafra, South Africa, and Ethiopia capture headlines. Many stories surge to the headlines and disappear quickly, leaving Americans with little understanding of the continent or the politics that drive it. From these points of information, the reader composes a constellation of understanding about Africa. Americans are left to believe that Africa is a confusing place with instability in government, society, and even country names. *Most Americans have never visited Africa, and will never visit Africa, yet there is an image in the American mind.* (3 emphasis mine)

I am, accordingly, no longer surprised by Horace Campbell's forthright observation that "At present, detailed knowledge about Africa is in the hands of a minority in Europe and America, while there is widespread ignorance on the part of the rest of the population" (215).

Convinced that "stereotyping" is Africa's albatross, the goal of this book is, however, not to explore the idea of stereotyping as a social scientific theoretical concept, but to take a look at stereotyping in practice which, no doubt, leads to an exposure of those who practice it and those against whom the practice is directed. Accordingly, one begins with the understanding that stereotyping has, at least, earned a working definition from which this effort takes off. The idea is that by dealing honestly with the stereotyping of Africa, Westerners may come to see how condescending and insulting it is—not that they are totally unaware of this fact; in fact, it is the *raison d'être* of this unfortunate practice. Africans, on the other hand, will come to learn how they and their culture are perceived and too often ridiculed in the West. This goal notwithstanding, a word or two about "stereotype," as a practice, especially as it relates to Africans, will not be out of place here.

Social psychologists have long grappled with the subject “stereotype” in an effort to define it successfully, but more so to find out its strengths and weaknesses and how it influences society. With further evidence from Lloyd A. Thompson’s *Romans and Blacks*, and Frank M. Snowden, Jr’s *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Graeco-Roman Experience*, Kate Lowe observes that stereotypes relating to black Africans undoubtedly existed before the Renaissance. The meaning is that this uncalled for albatross about the neck of the African is not recent; like most things Western relating to Africa, it has only been perfected or altered in keeping with changing Western attitudes of the times. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade emerged as a poignant spice in this unfortunate broth—stereotyping. As Lowe points out, credibly too, the transportation of so many blacks to the West during this slave trade occurred at a time when the West was struggling to define itself (17). And so 100 to about 150 years, after the first slaves were transported to Portugal in the 1440s, materialized as a period during which the idea of civilization emerged as critical to the self-image of the European. It was at this moment that certain European mannerisms came to be considered civilized and the strange ways of other peoples—non-Westerners, especially Africans who had been reduced to slaves by civilized peoples—as uncivilized. The result has been the deliberate ostracism of Africa (except South Africa) as a minor or insignificant player in world affairs hitherto; hence Africa’s portrait today as a continent that is of no value except that God thought of creating such a location as part of the world, along with its doomed inhabitants. This is stereotyping at work, yet when it comes to defining this term, there have been challenges as scholars wrestle with what attributes to include in the definition and what to leave out.

In his book *Understanding Prejudice and Discrimination* (2003), Scott Plous has observed that the term “stereotype” was coined by the French printer Didot in 1798 and it originally referred to a printing process used in creating reproductions. He goes on to observe that a journalist, Walter Lippmann (1922), “later likened stereotypes to ‘pictures in the head,’ or mental reproductions of reality and from there the term gradually came to mean generalizations—or quite often overgeneralizations—about the members of a group. As with prejudice, these generalizations can at times be positive..., but for

the most part they tend to be negative and resistant to change” (3). According to Kate Lowe, however,

At a more theoretical level, most discussions of stereotyping start with Gordon Allport’s 1954 definition: ‘an exaggerated belief associated with a category ... [whose] function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category’. This definition introduces ... two main aspects of stereotyping.... The first is that stereotyping does not allow differentiation between individuals within a category, thus leading to automatic and unthinking reactions. The second is that the process of justifying exaggerated beliefs can cause even a positive stereotype to have negative implications (17).

One thing stands out to me looking at attempted definitions of the term “stereotype”—the negatives outweigh the positives in what the term represents, and as Scott Plous rightly observes, “Stereotypes are not only harmful in their own right; they do damage by fostering prejudice and discrimination” (4). Plous goes onto identify some consequences of stereotyping which can be summed up as follows:

Once activated, stereotypes can powerfully affect social perceptions and behavior.... The activation of stereotypes can also lead people to behave in ways consistent with the stereotype.... In addition to the effects of priming, people who are stereotyped face a second burden: the threat that their behavior will confirm a negative stereotype. (23)

Plous points out that “Claude Steele and his colleagues have shown that this burden known as *stereotype threat*, can create anxiety and hamper performance on a variety of tasks” (23-24). In priming, participants in the study “...are exposed to a word or image that brings to mind thematically related ideas or associations concerning a target of prejudice (e.g. an ethnic minority group). Then, once an implicit prejudice or stereotype has been activated, researchers can assess its strength, content, and effect on other attitudes, beliefs, and behavior” (22). It is not surprising then that David J. Schneider points out that “stereotypes are rigid, and they stamp all to whom they apply to with the same characteristics” (8). He goes on to say stereotypes cannot be defined as merely inaccurate generalizations

about groups of people. Even though he agrees that stereotypes have negative content, are based on faulty reasoning, are rigid, and fail to encourage thinking about individuals, it is his opinion that “many of the traditional features of stereotypes are corollary rather than essential or defining.” (24) He points out though, that “stereotypes are qualities perceived to be associated with particular groups or categories of people.” (24) The bottom line is that in stereotypes, “...features are differentially associated with categories” (25). Consequently, I delve into this venture with the understanding that whereas social scientists will, more likely than not, continue struggling with the idea of defining “stereotype” effectively, Schneider’s line best sums up my final impression of the word and the attendant practice, mindful of the different emotional and cognitive forces that come to play in an effort to define stereotype: “stereotypes are generalization gone rotten” (19). It is with this mindset that I approach the stereotyping of Africa as revealed by these questions which I attempt to address herein.

This effort then stems from a realization that stereotyping Africa has led to the misinformation of people who now seem to care less about authenticating the portrait of the continent they have been fed. Talk of stereotypes refusing to change even as stereotyped “facts” change with the passing of time and the realization of erroneous beliefs that were held as facts, and Africa’s is a perfect exemplar. The goal in this venture is to show that even though individual examples of some generalized ideas may exist, Africa is vast, and as different as it is similar from place to place, such that certain stereotypes of the continent are plain stupid. The tenacity with which strangers to Africa interested in the continent continue to cling to old, while modifying and creating new stereotypes says a lot more about the perpetrators than about Africa. Linda Jacobs Altman confirms that “stereotypes survive despite logic and evidence to the contrary” because, as she points out, when a particular stereotype becomes outdated, new features are simply added (21). It would seem to me then, in spite of views that consider stereotyping as a natural consequence of cognition, that more often than not, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, are three trends that before long outlive their “usefulness” and degenerate into vicious shades of complexes that only help to define better the

souls of the perpetrators than those of the victims. There are scholars who also believe this, it would seem to me, especially after encountering Ruth Mayer's viewpoint which she supports with a quotation from Annie E. Coombes:

The rhetoric and imagery of colonialism, established in the heydays of imperial takeover, proved highly flexible and volatile, serving all kinds of purposes and interests after the demise of old-style colonial rule, when the incentives of unifying subjugation were challenged and new symbolic systems arose: "Representations of the African were, and are, evidently not 'fixed' but eminently recuperable and variable, depending on the political exigencies of any specific historical conjecture," holds Annie E. Coombs. 'As such, they tell us more about the nexus of European interests in African affairs and about the coloniser, than they do about Africa and the African over this period.' (Introduction 2)

These generalizations about Africa are offending because of how untrue, dishonest, and misleading they are. This is what has been going on with Sudan in recent years, for example, and being reported as "Africa" instead of "Sudan;" yet happenings in a small European country like Belgium, are treated as Belgian rather than European affairs. This kind of "blinker generalization" is dangerously misleading and stands in the path of progress. It is a lot easier and true to report a Nigerian event as Nigerian, and a Cameroonian occurrence as Cameroonian instead of applying the broad stroke—"Africa!" The idea that this is done to locate the countries, is ridiculous. Were the effort sincere, that because African countries have not been that notorious and so are little known, then the country should be mentioned first, and then "Africa" added as a way of locating a little known country instead of just saying "Africa." The kind of generalizations one can understand, and they are reasonably difficult to eradicate obtains when several African countries share a characteristic, for example, and then someone says "Oh, it is done in Africa." Even though this is not correct, it is tolerable, comparatively speaking, as it seems to be without the malice of "blinker generalizations" given birth to by bias and narrow-mindedness arising from cultural whims and caprices.

Within the last forty years, in particular, the number of Africans leaving the continent to other parts of the world, but especially to Europe and North America, for different reasons, has greatly increased. Ordinarily, these Africans constitute a new dimension to the populations of the countries where they settle and try to fit in as students, immigrants, and, of course, a reliable work force. Ironically, in Europe and North America, which in this venture are collectively referred to as the West, Africa and Africans continue to be misrepresented and misperceived for different reasons that are sometimes difficult to discern, let alone comprehend. Consider the fact that, in the 21st Century, many Americans still see Africans as half-clad savages roaming the jungles in pursuit of wildlife, the only other viable profession being goat herding. Yet when Westerners go around half-clad, it is alright and blamed on summer weather conditions; in like manner, their own pursuit of wildlife is just fine and called hunting. This mind-set of praising one thing when it is in one's culture but damning it when it occurs in another's is indeed sad and amounts to a rather unfortunate trend which needs to be addressed and halted. This is necessary because directly and indirectly, it affects, negatively, the effective productive capability of a significant labor force—immigrant Africans—on which countries in Europe and America have come to rely heavily, whether this is openly acknowledged or not. This is the disposition that has fueled rather bizarre impressions about Africans on the minds of Westerners leading to rather disturbing questions about Africans sometimes.

It is this pervading atmosphere, with all kinds of questions still being asked me about Africa by students, scholars, and the person on the street—the young and the old alike—sometimes politely and at other times condescendingly, that brought me to the realization that weird beliefs spun from the days of slavery through colonialism, of the black person as inferior and even evil, are not altogether fossilized, efforts towards this goal notwithstanding. There are still some powerful brain waves and perfect heartbeats belonging to this hideous doctrine in the West, even in areas where there is a significant black population and so one would have expected the people to be used to Africans and people of African descent already. In any case, as the saying goes, old habits die hard, and so one continues

encountering strange attitudes towards Africa and her descendants in the West, the main and shocking examples of these nations, given their activities in Africa, being England, France, Germany, and Belgium. The story is the same in North America (especially the United States), where until September 11, 2001, many people, outside government officials and experts, did not bother themselves that much about what was happening in other parts of the world. Carina Ray confirms my findings when she observes:

Racist assaults on global African humanity have not diminished in the post-slavery, post-independence or post-civil rights eras. In fact their vigor, boldness, and frequency are increasing at an alarming rate. Over the last year, alone, a battery of high profile incidents occurred in rapid succession in which deeply racist remarks and verbal assaults were targeted at Africans and people of African descent.

Ray illustrates her point by citing recent examples such as Michael Richards, alias Kramer, in the US sitcom *Seinfeld*, who during a performance in Los Angeles, in 2006, unleashed racist attacks, reminiscent of the lynching era, on some black members of his audience. Again, in 2007, the American talk show host, Don Imus, and Duane “Dog” Chapman, of the US reality show “Dog the Bounty Hunter,” shocked right-minded people by their use of racist language towards a basketball team of predominantly black players, and blacks as a whole respectively. Yet again, James Watson the well-known American molecular biologist noted for his work on the structure of DNA, flawed his integrity by claiming publicly, “that people of African descent are not as intelligent as people of European descent” (Ray). Finally, there is the fledgling French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, who during his maiden tour of Africa as president of France and a true disciple of Hegel and earlier European racists like Voltaire and Immanuel Kant, insulted Africans in his condescending speech at Senegal’s Cheikh Anta Diop University.

Even before these recent experiences, Hugh Trevor-Roper, for example, a distinguished English historian was stubbornly racist enough to persist along these lines. In his 1963 notorious remark, which has been repeatedly cited, Trevor-Roper denied that Africa

had any history and hoped the continent's future would provide one: "Perhaps in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none. There is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness." He later deigned to accord Africa some semblance of goings-on, but pointed out that it was nothing more than "the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe." How vain! One cannot help wondering then, if in this matter Trevor-Roper just cherished building verbal castles while enjoying the sounds, regardless of the meanings of his words, or if he really meant what he was saying, blinded by racist whims, else British activities in these "irrelevant corners" of the globe, which they fought to maintain as British territory, even today as the commonwealth, must have escaped this distinguished historian. That a person, let alone a scholar, could think and proclaim that there could be a bunch of people living together within a community of their own and yet not have a history goes a long way to illustrate the ravaging impact of racist thought. Were Trevor-Roper alive today, he would have benefited well from Valentine Ojo who has observed that:

...simply because the culture of a people has not consisted of the domination and dehumanization of others, of their brutalization and of the looting and exploitation of the wealth of other people and nations, does not make their way of life and their beliefs less a culture. The fact that the history of a people is not written in blood and does not leave a trail of blood, inhuman exploitation, and sufferings in its wake does not mean that such a people do not have a history – history cannot and should not be construed only as an anthology, a record of wars, destruction, and looting.

The scene today which continues not only to deny Africans (especially those south of the Sahara, and their descendants in the diaspora) possession of anything of value, but goes on to mystify the continent, has in fact added to the outlandish picture of the "dark continent." This, unfortunately, has been achieved through emotion-laden and regrettable portraits of the continent spun by some patronizing Westerners because of, in part, Africa's characteristic, yet not in any way unique, on-going socio-economic

unrests. Yes, Africa's socio-economic upheavals are qualities that decorate, or else have marked the historical landscape of virtually every culture from the earliest beginnings, even if some people continue playing ostrich to that fact by pretending that theirs has always been a perfect society. Yet Africa's most challenging difficulties are, more often than not, masterminded by Western politicians and economists alike, sometimes in the name of "aid," even as Western propagandists go about damning Africa for her inability to progress. Consider the slave trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and of recent, the effects of unfair international trade terms with Africa, and the consequences of the World Bank and International Monetary Funds' (IMF) loans and the attendant conditionalities imposed on the continent.² Accordingly, the sum total of the portrait of Africa on some Western minds and their resultant disposition towards Africa's sons and daughters, is hard to ignore, especially for an African, and for that matter, one who has a reasonably good understanding of both worlds: the West and the Motherland. Bosah Ebo, relating to the situation in America in particular, mindful of the available resources that could be used in educating the public, grieves:

America's news media have done less than an admirable job in their coverage of Africa. Much of what the American people know of Africa is derived from negative and misguided images of Africa portrayed in American media. These images usually portray Africa as a crocodile-infested dark continent where jungle life has perpetually eluded civilization....The underlying point is that Africa has no redeeming value to American or Western societies. (15)

By doing this to a people, the informant, be it the media or otherwise, is shortchanging the very population it is assuming to inform or educate. It is not surprising then, that to Beverly G. Hawk, the image of Africa on the American mind is not only incomplete but inaccurate. To Hawk, "Interpretations of African events are based on media placement and description and their interaction with previous understanding of Africa" (5). The scenario is the same for Europe, the West as a whole, and this is rather unfortunate after all, because when a culture or system insists on, and persists in

misinforming its people, then something is wrong somewhere. Armstrong Williams laments about this same practice when he points out that:

Reducing the pernicious Western stereotype that Africans all look and act the same, whether they are from Morocco, Zaire or South Africa would be a significant achievement

The media must play its part in this effort as well. Images of starving children playing in gutters amidst filth of unknown origin permeate our television screens and adorn newspapers and magazines across the county. Rarely is there an image shown where Africans do not appear as rapacious animals, violent criminals or helpless innocents. Reporting only the bad news, such as genocide, tells only half the story. The public needs to be much better informed and educated on what Africa is really about and what is truly at issue there.

It is a fact then, that after all these years, through misrepresentation, misinformation, or at best selective information by their own informants, writers, and governments alike, many Westerners have not been given the whole truth about Africa. Accordingly, was one to determine what Africa is like only on the basis of what one gets from media houses, then Africa would amount to nothing else but the only veritable reservoir of natural and man-made disasters of cataclysmic dimensions. Holland Cotter is saying the same thing when he writes:

If Martians tuned in to our television news broadcast, they'd have a miserable impression of life on Earth. War, disease, poverty, heartbreak and nothing else. That's exactly how most of the world sees Africa filtered through images of calamity. (B31)

Disaster, natural and otherwise, therefore, is an African phenomenon according to these propagandists. Accordingly, all the health problems with a rich variety of cancer-types, routine organ complications, and mental health problems; natural disasters like storms, tornadoes, wild fires; then discrimination, victimization, profiling, rape, the senseless stabbings and shooting of innocent

victims occurring in the West would amount to nothing compared to Africa's repertoire. But of course, as many have always replied when I have asked why only the bad about Africa is shown them, "bad news sells." This, however, is not just bad news; this is news that rhymes with the systems' avowed portrait of Africa. Larry Elder will agree with me, for he points out that "what a newspaper prints and what a television newscast runs is, by definition, subjective....In the end, news is what news gatherers say it is." (101) He goes on to add, "The media prints stories that confirm their viewing of the world," (101) hence Africa's persistent negative portrait in Western media waves, a tendency which deprives many Westerners of valuable information necessary for them to make educated decisions even about their own world. Some objective scholars, however, Basil Davidson, and John G. Jackson for example, and more recently the likes of Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, have been able to go against the grain by ascertaining and positing strongly that all else notwithstanding, Africa has values to be proud of, values from which the rest of the world has benefited. John Reader, with whom I sometimes disagree, is forthright in passing on this message:

... throughout recorded history, Africa has been woefully misunderstood and misused by the rest of the world. Humanity simply does not recognize its debts and obligations to Africa. In Western imagery, Africa is the 'dark continent.' A synonym perhaps, but also the potent symbol of a persistent inclination to set Africa and its inhabitants apart from the rest of humanity. The double meaning of the phrase is clear. The 'dark continent' does not refer only to the depths of Africa's equatorial forest, to the density of its tropical shadows, to the blackness of African skin, or even to the widespread lack of knowledge concerning the continent. Above all, the phrase tacitly labels Africa as the place where a very peculiar form of darkness is found – the darkness of humanity. In this context, Africa is where people do terrible things, not because the aptitude for such behaviour is a characteristic of all humanity, but because Africa is believed to be inherently more barbaric and less civilized than the rest of the world (x).

It is worthwhile pointing out, in any case, that there was, from the onset, mutual respect between the very first Westerners reaching Africa on the one hand and their African hosts on the other as they engaged in trade deals, until demand for labor in the West brought about the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade, easily the greatest act of barbarism in human history, was to change the nature of Africa's relationship with the West as Westerners started the search for excuses to justify this shameful abuse and exploitation of one race by another from a moral standpoint. It seemed most conducive to the ongoing crimes of torture that accompanied the trade in human beings, therefore, for the perpetrators of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade to dehumanize Africans in every way possible. To these culprits, Africans became sub-humans fit only for the exploitation of their muscles; hence, the slave trade, which flourished until the slaves started rebelling. Meanwhile, the trade also began hurting some European economies since they had transformed their trading partners—Africans—into cargo for sale with the effect of also losing the sources of other raw materials and markets for European finished products.

However, in an effort to present Africans as more than just unwilling victims of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, some scholars have often pointed to the existence of slavery in Africa before the arrival of the Westerner, while others have gone on to present the African, at least some, as willing and active partners in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. These scholars, all too often, forget to point out that the slaves in Africa they are referring to were usually criminals, debtors, or warriors taken captive in wars instead of free citizens stolen from their peoples and turned into slaves. Kofi Awoonor's explanation is elucidating:

What in strictly legalistic terms can be referred to as slavery had not been unknown in Africa before the transatlantic trade. Slavery had existed in parts of the world since historic times. In Africa, where society had no penal institutions such as prisons, it served as a method of controlling and punishing criminals and malcontents and of putting to productive service war captives, hostages, and children of debtors. The personal rights and conditions of slaves under this system were protected by traditional laws and overseen by communal responsibility. Besides, slavery was imposed for a specific

period and measured by the nature of the crime, the size of the debt, or the agreement on hostages; it was not a perpetual condition. The 'owner' was accountable to the community for the protection and welfare of the slave. It was possible to earn freedom by good behavior or purchase. The slave worked without reward. But in his spare time he could acquire movable property with which to buy his freedom and re-enter society as a man of good standing. (10-11)

Again, those accusing Africans of being willing and active partners in the Trans Atlantic slave trade, are yet to tell exactly what it was these Africans were told about their departing kin even if they started by selling war captives. Do we not see these trends still going on today? How come Westerners have control over oil or timber from African countries who are themselves not recognized internationally as suppliers of these commodities? How is it that African leaders govern their countries guided by alien theories that have nothing to do with the local cultural trends and tendencies? Some call this game hand twisting. The truth is that even until today, Eve is held guilty for introducing Adam to the biblical apple. Africans did not initiate the Trans-Atlantic slave trade even if they must share in the blame; this, however, can only be to a certain extent.

After about four hundred years of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, its toll, even on Western societies, started being felt through crashing economies, and governments becoming unpopular. At about the same time, there was the rise of some good people who began protesting against the slave trade in an effort to halt this mistreatment of human beings by human beings. The overall consequences of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade on Africa were cataclysmic: Africa's trans-Saharan trade was left in shambles; loved ones had been separated by slavers; whole communities were wiped out and the different occupations these people were involved in left redundant—hunting, mining, trading, and farming, to cite a few; very healthy generations of Africans were uprooted in great numbers from their culture and the territory they belonged to, to reinforce Western revolutions—agrarian and industrial—while Africa, left comatose, could only writhe in pain, confusion, and stagnation. Those fighting against the slave trade were ultimately victorious, but Africa's virtual

indispensability to Western survival was already an established fact, and so slavery, instead of coming to an end, only metamorphosed into another Western contrivance—colonialism.

With colonialism, Western nations started stacking claims to places they, hitherto, had only been exploring on a first-come first-served basis. They realized it was no longer a Portuguese or English affair; many other nations had discovered the economic value of Africa and were rushing in to claim a piece of the pie. The colonialists, as a result, started coming up in the face of other European invaders with boundaries and agreements signed with local leaders, usually under dubious circumstances, proving themselves recognized “owners” of these different territories. Colonialism came to a head with the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, when, influenced by concerned European nations, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck brought together fourteen Western nations to try and end the confusion reigning over the control of African territories. Matt Rosenberg’s comment on this conference is revealing:

The Berlin Conference was Africa’s undoing in more ways than one. The colonial powers superimposed their domains on the African continent. By the time independence returned to Africa in 1950, the realm had acquired a legacy of political fragmentation that could neither be eliminated nor made to operate satisfactorily.

Consequently, instead of Africa progressing, the continent continues to struggle, preoccupied with altercations resulting from colonial activities on the continent. Even the ridiculous level of corruption today exhibited by some African leaders resulted from Africans witnessing colonial administrators and businesses exporting Africa’s wealth back to their countries instead of investing it on the continent. African politicians, accordingly, aped their western predecessors in all that they did, even when it was wrong for their countries. Meanwhile, local tensions from rivalry stemming from ethnic inequalities put in place by colonialist administrators made progress at the local level virtually impossible. It was, for example, difficult to begin developing a particular area without the other crying foul; the result of forcing different peoples to co-exist as one

people without the one or the other having naturally established itself as the dominant group through some “natural process” like a battle or war of some sort.

In 1919, at the Versailles Peace Conference after World War I, European nations came together to punish Germany which had been vanquished during the war, and so ended up dividing her African colonies amongst the victorious allied nations without consulting the Africans themselves. Germany’s African colonies were war booty, in other words, used for compensating allied nations. Cameroon, for example, which was a German territory before the war, was arbitrarily handed over to the British and the French, with the French taking over the geographically larger and more populous piece. Thus, a new phase in the exploitation of Africa had started with the approval of “civilized” nations, themselves leaders in the process.

The West claimed that through colonialism it hoped to civilize Africa and this was to be done, it would appear, by attempting to transform Africans into Westerners through instilling into the former values native to the latter. Accordingly, the African was forced to learn the language of the Western colonizer, while all too often denied the right to use his. In the same manner, other institutions of the West were imposed on Africans: their system of educating, adjudicating, worshiping, and farming—their entire worldview. Africa’s economy, for example, was now designed to feed Western societies with the raw materials to sustain their industries—timber, rubber, cocoa, coffee, etc—which produced finished goods that were then sold back to Africa in particular, at exorbitant rates for huge profits. The Africans could not fight back as the Westerners used their soldiers and advanced war machinery to squash, in the bloodiest manner, any opposition to their goals. Thus, the train of Africa’s potential natural evolution jumped the rails. They now lived to work and keep the colonial train of exploitation rolling at full force, while their families and their needs were reduced to non-issues. Traditional leaders and heads of families trying to re-divert their energies to their peoples and families found themselves publicly humiliated, exiled, or had their communities wiped out by colonial troops, usually re-enforced by brainwashed or conscripted Africans under the command of colonial officers.

The exploitation of Africans by the West enabled Westerners to establish their race as superior although for a brief while only. The Africans who fought for the allies during WWI, for example, saw Westerners disagreeing with and even slaughtering each other and these Africans had themselves fought against other white people, killing them in the process. These scenes and occurrences helped demystify the picture of invincibility, superiority, and integrity the white man had painted of himself in the eyes of the African. Armed with such newfound knowledge, these Africans were not to return to their countries to assume the second class status they had been accorded before the war. In addition, a new cream of Africans such as teachers, clergymen, clerks, lawyers and journalists was also emerging, and they were now capable of understanding the languages and intentions of colonial nations. Together with the returning soldiers, there was now a new force the colonialist had to contend with unlike before when their languages were unknown and they could easily manipulate and fool the Africans. This new class was that which, for example, questioned Churchill's interpretation of Clause Three of the Atlantic Charter of 1941. The clause, which professed British and the United States governments' respect for all people's rights to choose the form of government they were to be subject to, and which expressed these governments' desire to see sovereign rights and self government returned to those who had been forcibly deprived of this right, was quickly interpreted by the shrewd Churchill as not applicable to Africa. This was, in a way, a remote beginning of the tendency that raged over Africa around the mid 20th Century as African peoples started questioning the administrative techniques of the colonialists. Fed up with the high-handed nature of Western administrators, Africans tore beyond just agitating for rights and privileges for themselves into demanding independence from colonialist nations. Contrary to what the West loves history to report and for people to believe, Africans had to struggle and sometimes fight costly bloody wars to free themselves from the yoke of colonialism; this was the case, to cite one example, with the Algerian War of Liberation fought against the French for years before independence in 1962. George S. Fichter confirms: "By the mid 1900s, if it [freedom] were not granted outright, they began to fight for it. Slowly, and in some cases only after bloody conflicts ranging from minor skirmishes to all-out wars, the demand

of the Africans began to be met. The huge colonial empires were divided into independent countries” (6). In fact, many African countries, especially those that were colonized by the French, are independent today only in principle; the reality is another thing altogether. For people who claimed to have been in Africa to help civilize the people, Binyavanga Wainaina echoes my point when he observes about the disgruntled manner in which these supposed philanthropists left:

It should be remembered ... that not much was left to build new nations with. The British disemboweled the entire industrial infrastructure in Eritrea during World War II. In 1958, when the French were pulling out of Guinea, they took everything: cutlery, furniture, telephones, even, it is said the blueprints to the electricity grid. In the Congo, the Belgians left overnight. (Wainaina 91-92)

So much for the altruistic portrait the West loves to paint of its devastating colonialist activities on the continent of Africa.

Independence, therefore, was a costly venture for Africans as they paid in jail sentences, abducted, tortured, and maimed loved ones, and other bloody encounters. With their independence yanked out of the colonialists’ grip, Africans could barely celebrate before the next seeds of Western exploitative activities began germinating. Africa had been completely derailed by her encounter with the West, as not even the landscape was the same any longer, with all the huge plantations beneficial to Western markets and industries taking over forests and natural vegetation, coupled with gaping holes left behind by mining and other ventures. Most devastating is the fact that the peoples’ way of life, their culture, that which made them a people, was now piebald, infected by Western features adopted, especially in strategic high circles. Strange communities and sometimes blatant rivals with conflicting cultural values had been forced to coexist by the colonialists, with one group being favored at the expense of the others to Western ends—the unhindered exploitation of Africa. With Africans taking control of their affairs, the blisters of colonialism ruptured, spilling forth long suppressed differences which, more often than not, led to crashing economies, internal strife, bloody conflicts, and in some cases, outright war. The result was a regression in virtually every aspect of African life,

as the puppets put in place by disgruntled departing colonialist nations stood in the path of positive change for their nations, while once more enslaving their nations to former colonialist whims.

Accordingly, even with independence, the continuous meddling of the West has not made things any easier for the continent. The French, for example, manipulated Ahmadou Ahidjo of Cameroon into power in the late 1950s and, comparatively speaking, he went on to stagnate Cameroon as with French support he eliminated his political rivals and then instituted fear and dictatorship by emerging with a Gestapo that denied citizens the right to think differently from this autocrat. Without new and rivaling ideas, the nation's progress was thus held hostage. As late as 1971, France could still boast of a great number of top ranking officers in the Cameroonian armed forces being French citizens. Although there has been some significant change, the truth is that even under the incumbent Paul Biya, one all too often runs into French soldiers behaving arrogantly as they drive in elite military jeeps around the streets of the oil rich city of Limbe.

In Gabon, in 1964, the French reversed the result of a coup d'état by restoring Leon Mba to power (Richard Joseph). After him, came Omar Bongo who had to meet French expectations in order to be permitted to rule his own country, and he had been in power for about forty years before his death on June 8, 2009. Are we surprised then by Richard Joseph's lament that

...the vice in which France has kept its former African territories appears all the more remarkable. 'Neo-colonialism' seems too general a term to convey the degree of economic, fiscal, political, diplomatic, and cultural dependence France has imposed on its former African territories by means of the so-called Cooperation Agreements signed with the newly independent countries For analytical purposes, we can see contemporary political developments in former French Africa being influenced by (1) French historical traditions dating back to the Revolution of 1789, (2) political and economic strategies in metropolitan France involving the manipulation of the francophone periphery, and (3) French-African ties serving, conversely, to maintain in power those local elites permitted by France to inherit legal sovereignty. (3-4)

Jean Bedel Bokassa of Central African Republic is another example of a French puppet who ruined his country. In a most bizarre display of loyalty to his French masters, Bokassa installed himself emperor in a manner reminiscent of the Napoleonic era, thereby wasting resources he could have used in managing his “poor” country in a most ridiculous ceremony.

Mobutu Sese Seko, another example, came into and stayed in power thanks to U.S. meddling in Congolese affairs. John Tirman’s presentation of the scenario is vivid:

...he came into power in this populous, resource-rich, and ethnically diverse central African nation with the connivance of the CIA and the U.S.—condoned murder of the charismatic leftist leader Patrice Lumumba. Mobutu Sese Seko, a general, ruled from 1965 until unrest fomented by the genocide in Rwanda stirred a militant opposition movement against him in the mid-1990s. Thirty years of U. S.-backed rule left the country in shambles, and the consequent civil war left three million dead and the country a cesspool of instability.

Mobutu was a paragon of a kleptocrat and ruthless dictator, executing opponents at will and stealing \$5billion for his Swiss bank accounts. The United States nonetheless continued to support him for the usual cold war reasons. (75)

Yet African countries like these are called poor, while the patriots struggling to free their compatriots from doomed dictatorial regimes like Mobutu’s which are destroying their countries, are branded rebels. Richard Sandbrook confirms these struggles by African patriots while also confirming Western support for regimes that cannot be tolerated by Westerners in their own countries when he observes:

Political demonstrations and riots rocked most one-party states and military juntas between 1989 and 1991. People were fed up with erratic, self-serving, and corrupt – not to mention oppressive – governance.

This ferment coincided with a dramatic shift in the development establishment’s view of what needed to be done to reverse sub-Saharan Africa’s economic decline. *On the one hand, the tarnished allure of socialism and the waning of the Cold War had eroded the Western powers’ strategic interest in protecting*

friendly, yet manifestly unpopular, African dictators. On the other hand, many authoritarian African regimes had succumbed to a capricious and predatory economic management. (1 emphasis mine.)

These Western countries usually corrupt the puppet by paying him to look the other way while the resources of his country are exploited with reckless abandonment. If he turns out to have his people's welfare at heart, like the late Captain Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, which means not cooperating with the imposing Western nation, then they stage-manage another political drama which culminates in his death—a coup d'état, for example. In the process, they groom and install a puppet to whom is made available the latest weapons of oppression. With these weapons, the puppet, now deranged by their support, wipes out innocent citizens opposing his personal, and more often than not, Western orchestrated decisions which benefit his country nothing. Accordingly, the African nation falls in place when subsequently chaos erupts—one more African mess of a nation incapable of managing its affairs through the practice of democracy.

That such unfortunate relationships do exist, even today, between supposedly independent African nations and former colonialist and other Western governments is of epic moment to the story of Africa's predicament today. In return for their loyalty, these puppets get their personal accounts in foreign banks inflated (by embezzling public funds) beyond what one might consider politically reasonable pilfering limits—if one can talk of any such thing—without civilized Western nations protesting. After all, their economies make huge profits investing such ill-gotten wealth while the African nations to which the money rightfully belongs are paraded as poor and unhealthy. But how could Western nations protest when the process facilitated phase three of their draining of Africa. This was neo-colonialism now at work—former colonialist nations were still controlling their former colonies, but this time with a local figurehead receiving orders from the incumbent leader in the former colonizing nation.

This is the macabre dance characteristic of African nations and the West today, meanwhile, ordinary Westerners on the streets, unaware of the devastating covert roles of their governments in African countries, sit and wonder at these Africans who cannot

seem to be “civilized” and manage a simple government, with newspapers screaming insulting headlines such as “Africa Again!” as one more African nation relapses into fresh problems. Hence the return to the painting of more insulting portraits of Africa by modern day writers who sound like a cult determined to revamp or better still maintain Hegelian and Conradian images and doctrines of the continent.

Africa has incredible problems today, no doubt about that, but Africa was not a vast wasteland waiting for the arrival of the West, not with thriving kingdoms like the Zulu, Ashanti, and Yoruba; empires like Ethiopia, Songhai, and Kanem Bornu, to name a few; educational centers like Timbuktu; and the trans-Saharan trade in gold, salt, and more. On the other hand, Africa would not have been the troubled spot it is today, after the departure of the colonialists, if only Africa had been left alone even after all the assault on the continent. The fact remains that, even to date, Africa’s problems can be traced to immediate and remote causes thanks to the colonial encounter and the attendant consequences. No, even after all that the continent has been through, Africa is a place with its own rich and diverse values and not some emptiness waiting and striving to ape the West as some theorists and propagandists would love the world to believe. These are a people struggling to maintain, and in some cases restore their rich and noble cultures which the West seems determined to eradicate by choking down their throats mostly irrelevant Western values—capitalism, Christianity, multi-party democracy, and the likes—in the name of development and civilization.

This effort, especially because of how it is presented—questions and answers—I hope will go beyond the realms of academia, which is already reasonably well furnished with “scholarly” works on Africa. Beyond the realm of academia, this project targets, in the main, the domain of “ordinary” readers without pretensions; ordinary readers who may still love to learn the basic truth about a continent that has been transformed into anathema but have not been disposed to follow frequently passionate scholarly debates and theories while being tormented by the need to cart about hefty volumes. And so this group that forms the potentially powerful majority has been left with strange and sometimes fantastic impressions as their mentors, in most cases, strew aspersions, generalizations of mostly

false (because of how they are de-contextualized) and uncanny pictures of Africa at them until the arrival of objective and open-minded Africanists the likes of Basil Davidson, John G. Jackson, Patrick Chabal, and Jean-Pascal Daloz upon the scene. Even then, how embarrassing it is today to see Anderson Cooper of CNN in Africa showing only the poor and the slums; it sure sells. One cannot help wondering if Cooper was not surprised by some of the cities he met in Africa, given his original image of the continent, but no, that's not that exotic Africa which, alas, is brought to life by men slaughtering monkeys in remote villages where Cooper and others believe AIDs jumped the "species-line." Not that this is not Africa, but that there is more that an objective reporter would have loved the world, so misguided about the continent, to see. Again, consider those close-up shots media houses show of Africa all the time when a Western head of state is visiting an African country, for example, and one marvels if their cameras do not have panoramic modes, or is it that these modes stop functioning in African towns and cities only to begin functioning again in their slumps and game resorts? The West needs to grow up and realize that it is simple common knowledge that nothing is all bad nor is there anything all good on earth; every beautiful thing or person has its, or his or her ugly side. This is true of Africa; it is true of the West, the huge skyscrapers, wide roads, and manicured neighborhoods notwithstanding. To persist thus with such distorted portrayals of Africa is to maintain an alarming level of ignorance not befitting the rendering of the West presented by the media or some writers on every occasion.

The excitement of most people each time I have told them the truth about Africa, the occasional disbelief and then wonder and sometimes awe even, at seeing the truth proven before their eyes, made this effort a must to me. This may sound trivial, yet when a scholarly and widely traveled colleague appeared stunned by the sight of couches in a picture of my home in Cameroon, Africa, the gravity of the situation struck home. The seriousness of the situation convinced me of the need of a simple effort to help especially indoctrinated Westerners to take a peek through the thick and intimidating dark foliage of the jungles of Africa that has been planted and groomed on their minds for centuries—to their own undoing—by biased and racist writings. If, in the 21st century, a Westerner believes that there are no couches in African homes, then

the sum total of the system of education or information dissemination of any such nation parading any such citizen has been a disservice to the citizenry.

Another reason I considered this venture a must, is so as to bequeath to those people who look up to Africa, in simple and plain terms, that deserved pride in a motherland which is rightfully theirs, in spite of how she has been battered by waves of foreign assaults intended to relegate the continent to the garbage heap of the world. People talk of their heritage with so much pride, but unless the black person in the diaspora, for example, knows the truth about Africa's predicament, which truth has always been misrepresented by understatements, exaggerations, generalizations, de-contextualizations, specialized diction, and stereotypes, this cannot be the case for him or her. In the West, Africa continues to be presented as nothing more than a "country," the "third world," where the white man's effort at civilization has not yielded fruit, and where poverty and disease run wild. Africa is that other "country" where the naked, or at best dirty and illiterate "natives" adorning grass skirts and loin cloths, continually relapse into sub-human standards frequently tortured by "native" sexual orgies; a "country" where animals and pristine nature are the only reasons one should bother thinking about the territory at all, as even the peoples' phonetic constructions are laughable tongue-twisters which, at best, qualify as vernaculars and not languages. Charles Kimball is of the same opinion for he writes:

For many centuries Africa and its people seemed strange to the rest of the world. Generations of traders came by ship or by caravan, to purchase Africa's wealth in gold, ivory, and human beings, but their reports produced more mysteries than they solved. Where did the Africans come from? Why did they look so different from other men, and have different customs? Eventually the Europeans concluded that Africans were savages, inferior human beings, and they couldn't help being the way they are.

Even then, already past the threshold of the 21st Century, Binyavanga Wainaina, again, laments the unchanging portrait characteristic of stereotyping:

As I sit here, in upstate New York, and read *The New York Times*, or watch CNN, Africa feels like one fevered and infectious place. In this diseased world, viruses spread all over—and a small local crisis in one corner can infect the rest of the continent in one quick blink....

This habit—of trying to turn the second-largest continent in the world, which has 53 countries and nearly a billion people of every variety and situation, into one crisis giant—is now one of the biggest problems....

We have learned to ignore the shrill screams coming from the peddlers of hopelessness. (94)

Uzodinma Iweala is also painfully aware of this unchanging desire to continue portraying Africa as the land without hope, the continent which can pass for nonsense. First she paints in a vivid manner, the West's new portrait of itself:

This is the West's new image of itself: a sexy, politically active generation whose preferred means of spreading the word are magazine spreads with celebrities pictured in the foreground, forlorn Africans in the back. Never mind that the stars sent to bring succor to the natives often are, willingly, as emaciated as those they want to help.

Then she goes on to highlight the damaging effect of these gestures, something Africa has been suffering from for centuries:

Such campaigns however well intentioned, promote the stereotype of Africa as a black hole of disease and death. News reports constantly focus on the continent's corrupt leaders, warlords, 'tribal' conflicts, child laborers, and women disfigured [supposedly] by abuse and genital mutilation. The descriptions run under headlines like 'Can Bono Save Africa?' or 'Will Brangelina Save Africa?' The relationship between the West and Africa is no longer based on openly racist beliefs, but such articles are reminiscent of reports from the heyday of European colonialism, when missionaries were sent to Africa to introduce us to education, Jesus Christ, and 'civilization.'

Iweala's conclusion on the impact this has on Africans and Westerners is classic:

There is no African...who does not appreciate the help of the wider world, but we do question whether this aid is genuine or given in the spirit of affirming one's cultural superiority. My mood is dampened every time I attend a benefit whose host runs through a litany of African disasters before presenting a (usually) wealthy, white person, who often proceeds to list the things he or she has done for the poor, starving Africans. Every time a well-meaning college student speaks of villagers dancing because they were so grateful for her help, I cringe. Every time a Hollywood director shoots a film about Africa that features a Western protagonist, I shake my head—because *Africans, real people though we may be, are used as props in the West's fantasy of itself. And not only do such depictions tend to ignore the West's prominent role in creating many of the unfortunate situations on the continent, they also ignore the incredible work Africans have done and continue to do to fix those problems.* (emphasis mine).

Simply put, it is a lie that the rest of the world is genuinely interested in saving Africa; the point is that because the West strives to maintain an unlevel playground, Africa continues struggling with occasionally misleading handouts dished out to some Oliver Twist heads of state on the continent. Were the nations of the West serious about change in Africa, they should begin by neutralizing international trade terms so nobody is favored as the West is today, and not interfere when Africans try to oust an unpatriotic dictator who is a Western stooge in favor of a true patriot. Whatever the case, it is this disturbingly deranging mentality on the part of the aggressors and, to some extent, those preyed upon, that needs to be set right by this effort. For, as Kimball goes on to point out, "The so-called 'dark continent,' it turns out, is not just a land of endless savagery and chaos. Its people have a history of their own, and have created cultures, nations, and art that often compare favorably to what other cultures have produced."

I felt encouraged, therefore, to move on with this venture because of the rather disconcerting atmosphere conjured by the stereotyping of Africa. The level of ignorance projected is as disturbingly

incredulous as it is at times absurd. Accordingly, it was a pleasant surprise with a catalytic effect on this project as well as a confirmation of my judgment about the gravity and urgency surrounding this problem when years after I started researching the answers to some of these questions, I realized that the thorough and distinguished brains behind *Ebony* magazine were equally troubled by the upsetting stereotype of the continent of Africa burned into the public consciousness of the West, especially the United States. According to *Ebony*:

Say the word “Africa” and, for most Americans, it conjures images of war, genocide, famine, HIV/AIDS and political corruption. Sure those problems exist. But there is another Africa not often seen on our television screens or in our newspapers. It’s an Africa that looks and feels and sounds like much of America itself. It is an Africa where men and women work, dance, struggle and succeed; an Africa where children do homework and play video games, all the while dealing with the complex life around them. (“An Unfamiliar Africa” 111)

It is not surprising then, that *Ebony*, like *National Geographic*, came up with stories addressing the damaging effects of the stereotype of Africa and her descendants in the diaspora while attempting to reveal what Africa is truly like. I was thus convinced that the project I had embarked on was not of little merit as it seemed to me at one point in time. My conviction, however, was complete when I read Sylvester Monroe’s article “The Africa You Don’t Know: There is much more to the Motherland than Negative Media Highlights” (113) and found my experiences echoed in that of the Nigerian journalist Gbemisola Olujobi. Monroe’s words best present the scene:

Nigerian journalist Gbemisola Olujobi likes to tell the story of how on a recent trip from Lagos to Washington, D.C., she passed the time at Dulles Airport engaging in small talk with an airport employee.

‘I hear in Africa, people are very poor and hungry, that they don’t have anything to eat,’ he said. ‘I saw a documentary on Africa a few days ago on CNN, and there were all these hungry people, dying children, with flies all over their faces.... But you look well fed.’

Not knowing exactly how to respond, the British-educated writer let the clueless American know that Africa is not ‘one huge expanse of waste,’ but 52 countries in different stages of development, repair, disrepair and despair.

‘Famine in Niger does not mean hunger in Nigeria, just as war in Liberia does not mean child soldiers in Lesotho,’ she told him.

The short lecture seemingly had no effect. The man asked, ‘But what is the problem with Africa?’ as if he hadn’t heard a word Olujobi had said about Africa’s vast diversity.

The frustrated African does not blame the American from the airport or countless others who have come to her with similar questions. She’s been asked whether Africans keep their cowry shells (once used as currency in parts of Africa) in banks, or how she picked up such good English.’ Instead Olujobi, like many Africans from every part of the continent, points to the Western media. (113-115)

At the very least, Westerners should be reasonably informed as the vast majority are, according to media images and other important reports about the West. *Ebony*’s determination to cover Africa on several occasions just like *National Geographic* did, confirmed the timely and equally strategic nature of this book. But how such a book was to be written, such that it is entertaining yet serious enough, remained a problem. After numerous consultations, I settled on maintaining the “Question and Answer” format I had decided on. Such a structure would be user-friendly enough for the person not used to peering inside books for lengthy periods—my primary audience—yet equally rewarding to the academic because of the in-depth research carried out in an effort to answer the different questions.

Attitude

1. **I get the impression that Africans are arrogant. Is this true? What is the general attitude or emotions of Africans?**

Africa is a whole continent made up of dozens of nations, and millions of families, yet it is obvious that even in a single household, the children are not all of one temperament. In every society, one is likely to find all character types: those who are friendly and those who are hostile, those who are introverted and those who are extroverted, and yes, even those who are humble and those who are arrogant. This is true of Africa also. Whatever the case, Africans are some of the most humble and hospitable people one can find on the face of the globe, and this is virtually a cultural prerequisite. Husbands insist that their wives and children show hospitality to their guests, even in the husband's absence. Accordingly, it is not surprising to hear a husband, even though this is an extreme example, instructing the wife to give even his own meal to their guest should he be away when the guest shows up and to inform him of it later on should he himself end up with nothing to eat. Otherwise, parents passing on this attribute always ask their kids to ensure that at least a glass of water is given their guest if they are completely out of food. Kevin Kertscher shares a similar view of Africa's hospitality for he says of Africans after his solo trip across the Sahara, the Sahel, and the Congo which greatly affected him because of the suffering, isolation and stoicism he encountered: "I had wanted to meet some interesting people along the way, but I had not expected to find smiles and voices and brief friendships that would stand in my mind forever" (247). He later adds of Africans, "... a quiet people who simply want to live their lives without being oppressed by poverty or politics" (255-256). Jonathan Power, on his part, says of Africa and Africans:

I have covered war and revolution in Africa. I have seen political opponents hung from the bridges of the main thoroughfare in Conakry. I have been falsely imprisoned in Sierra Leone. I have lived for months the village life in Lesotho and Tanzania. I walk the streets of Nigerian towns at night (parts, but not all, of Lagos excepted). But I have very rarely been afraid....

Africans are usually the most courteous, hospitable, forgiving and cheerful of all the people I have met on God's earth.

This notwithstanding, if someone tries dealing with Africans with an attitude, especially one of condescension, which is the general disposition towards the continent, especially Africa south of the Sahara, then one will find Africans really combative and even extremely arrogant as a result. So it is a matter of the disposition one displays towards an African, like any other human being, that generates a particular response—humility and friendliness, or arrogance in the other extreme.

2. Are Africans naturally violent and criminal?

This was one question I could not help wondering what led to it, other than the fact that the general portrait of the black person (especially the men) in the United States is that he/she is potentially violent and criminal. I have always wondered, however, as to how sensible it is to claim that a people can all be good or bad. Whatever the case, I must begin by stating categorically that no, Africans are not naturally violent, nor are they criminal; not in Africa, not anywhere else. Like with every people on the face of the earth, there are those who are violent and others who are criminals in every race or group just as there are good people. In Africa itself, especially during the days when tradition was still virgin, crimes were rare because one's actions and temperament impacted upon one's family as a whole and not just the culprit's. This tendency in society resulted in effectively limiting crime to the barest minimum. However, this might not be the case everywhere else where the black person from Africa has come to find himself or herself today, which he or she refers to as home. In these places, it must be observed though, that it is not the black person's fault that he or she is suddenly being stereotyped as naturally criminal. In the main, it is the fault of the new-found communities which have succeeded largely in frustrating the relevant black population through stereotypical and discriminatory practices. The outcome, in most cases, is the emergence of desperados as members of the victim-race struggle to survive against the odds—nowadays subtle yet effectively—working against them. With such an attitude, it is not

surprising that the black person will go to any reasonable length, even if it means getting angry, in an effort to get that which is his simple birthright as a human being. It is this struggle to come across as a human being who is unfairly treated by a prejudiced society that is being intentionally misconstrued and portrayed as being naturally violent. The black person's plight as a victim, for centuries now, is unique. Africans have become very aware of this, be it in Africa or elsewhere, and are willing to die fighting for their God-given rights rather than live an ambushed, abused, exploited, and insulted life on the fringes of society tortured by fear and oppression. No, the African is not naturally criminal; the African is only trying to survive in the face of overwhelming odds imposed on his people—after experiences such as the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and globalization—by humankind.

3. I have been advised to beware the way I use the word “tribe” when relating to Africans. Why is this?

The reason why caution is needed when using the term “tribe” in relation to Africa is simply because in certain circumstances, especially when Westerners use it, a term which is as old as the days described in the Bible, it is given a pejorative bent. In the case of Africa, when Westerners say “tribe,” they do not simply mean a particular group of people encompassing numerous families and clans that belong to a particular place, but one that is, according to the Westerner, backward, poor, “uncivilized,” even a lot more. Lamin Sanneh's explanation with relation to both the words “race” and “tribe,” is enlightening:

When used of Africans, ‘race’ and ‘tribe’ carry the meaning of a people without history or a knowledge of history....They entail the cultural meaning of a people with no historical record—specimens of nature unrefined by discipline, struggle, and self-control, and thus incapable of logical thinking or polite behavior. (156)

This rather unfortunate use of an otherwise harmless word came into more frequent use with its rather derogatory insinuations round about the 19th century. As Bill Berkeley confirms and explains further:

The very term ‘tribe’ came into general use in the colonial era. The term was associated with stereotypes of Africans as primitive brutes. For evolutionist anthropologists in their nineteenth-century heyday, ‘tribal’ society conjured up an early stage of human development with minimal state organization, class structure, literacy or other features of ‘civilized’ societies. (12)

In the preface of their book *Africa and the World: An Introduction to the History of Sub-Saharan Africa from Antiquity to 1840* Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duignan display an awareness of this problem surrounding the word “tribe,” for which reason they go on to explain their use of the word in their book because they consider it “appropriate within certain contexts” (xiv). Two things are obvious in their effort to explain their own use of the word: firstly, they are aware of the fact that some Africanists object to its use, and secondly, they themselves consider it appropriate only “within certain contexts” (xiv). Theirs is a learned but unconvincing endeavor at denying the insulting reverberations around the use of this word “tribe.” Firstly, it is true, as they argue, that while white-skinned Jews proudly refer to their ancestral Twelve Tribes, and Germans talk of Swabians, Bavarians, and Saxons of *Stämme* or tribes, Africans today also talk of themselves in terms of tribes; nevertheless, it is not the same thing when a white man talks of tribes while referring to Africa. As already indicated, the condescending reverberations are loaded. Unfortunately, this is one of those things about which one can hardly say this is an example of when the word “tribe” is used insultingly, but like many other human attitudes, love, hate, sarcasm, and so on, it can be felt and sensed when at work. This is a fact, and the perpetrators know and understand this even if some scholars profess otherwise in public. The use of the word “tribe” here is typical of virtually all else about Africa—black Africa. The truth is that when it comes to Africa, Westerners relapse into a special vocabulary shelved somewhere in their subconscious which at once helps to maintain the primitive archetypal image instilled in them by their culture of superiority, or is it oppression? Anyone who doubts it should study the vocabulary employed say by the media when reporting events in Africa similar

to those somewhere in Europe and he or she is sure to learn a lot. Clashes in Africa are frequently described as “tribal,” or “black-on-black,” but nobody calls the clashes in Northern Ireland “white factionalism” or “white-on-white violence” or tribal bloodshed (Hawk). If such familiar, yet denigrating vocabulary is not used, then the story certainly has nothing to do with Africa. “Tribe,” is one potent word in that vocabulary especially reserved for referring to Africa or native America, which in fact means nothing other than to help conjure loved stereotypical images of primitive savages that Western complex has indoctrinated its people to believe exist mainly in the “dark” continent of Africa and virgin America. As some scholars have argued, the definitions of the word “tribe” are flawed and rarely mean anything as they conjure up social groups that are practically nonexistent. An example will illustrate this point further: Aidan W. Southall observes about the word tribe:

Controversial though the matter is, the most generally accepted characteristics of a tribal society are perhaps that it is a whole society, with a high degree of self-sufficiency at a near subsistence level, based on a relatively simple technology without writing or literature, politically autonomous and with its own distinctive language, culture and sense of identity, tribal religion also being coterminous with tribal society. (38)

Southall goes on to argue that dozens of definitions could, of course, be cited from different authorities, yet all they do is add nothing to understanding while varying only in the area where they add emphasis: language, politics, self identity and so on. He, accordingly, maintains his definition of what a tribal society is before concluding that in the strict sense these tribal societies “cannot exist, since there are no areas of the inhabited earth unclaimed by one sovereign state or another” (39). If this is the case, then why is the word tribe always coming up when the area of reference is Africa?

Age

4. How do you treat age in Africa?

Africans, do not fear age as is the case in other cultures where people do all to look young. To Africans, aging is a natural process that must come, and when it begins manifesting itself, they are not troubled; instead, it is well received and the individual makes the best use of this newly acquired wand of authority. In Africa, because of the world of experience elders have by virtue of their ages, they are expected to behave accordingly: mature, respectful, and disciplined. Because these elders are usually parents also, although not a *sine qua non* for one to be considered an elder, they are the role models in society, and everyone looks up to them for guidance in virtually every aspect of life. In the words of Michael Ba Banutu-Gomez:

Age is important in Africa because one is valued and respected in society according to one's age and performance as an example to those younger. Age is a sign of dignity, prestige, respect, and status in the society. Someone who has gray hair is in a special class: a class of respect, of consultation, of advisement, of positive example. Such people will have the respect of the community and be supported and valued. (12)

Beyond just being role models, they are the custodians of culture, the ways of the community which they hand down from generation to generation; hence, the respect and authority they command and wield in society. Within Somalian communities, for example, Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi points out about respect for parents, the aged, and their authority:

Somalis are brought up to respect their parents and to seek advice and blessings (*du o*) from them. Lack of deference for parents brings forth *habaar* (curse). To secure blessings from parents, a sixty-year-old Somali may be seen asking an aged parent for blessings and even advice on how to deal with certain matters. Old parents whose own offspring have started their own households are viewed as the center of the extended family. They are asked to arbitrate in disputes between brothers and sisters. At other times, the old parents may ask

for contribution from their grown offspring to help a member of the family who is not doing well. In other words, parents in their senior years never retire from family management. (126-127)

It is this respect for age, the elders and their ways of doing things that led to gerontocracy as an established pattern within African communities.

5. I hear you have age-groups in Africa?

Yes, because of the importance of age as a social factor, there are age-groups in African societies. These age-groups help with the structuring and running of traditional African societies, as people will meddle only in the affairs of members of their own age groups, unless otherwise authorized. This age group affair is somewhat more flexible than it might sound. According to Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duignan,

Age-sets provided for a somewhat higher degree of political organization. Age-sets consisted of men born at about the same time, who were formally initiated into a kind of all male corporation. Each age-set had its own name, insignia, songs, and dances. The members residing in one particular district formed a local chapter. Men remained in the same age-set throughout their lives, but graduated successively from initiate to warrior, and finally from warrior to elder. The chapters regulated most day-to-day activities, and the chapters in turn formed part of a wider hierarchy of age grades. The younger warriors raided cattle from hostile neighbors and also provided a readily available reserve for defense. The senior men acted as the executive arm of the elders. The elders in turn exercised ritual powers, adjudicated in difficult matters, and decided general policy. Under the age-set system political office, so to speak, was collectivized. There were political distinctions, but each man would rise successively from a relatively low station to the position of elder, together with his age-mates. Social life was thus strictly regulated; the community could mobilize relatively large military forces; but no man had hereditary claim to rank or office, and none could call himself a ruler. (486)

Although Gann and Duignan overlook it, women's groups too exist, and it was seen as an index of ignorance not to know female counterparts. In any case, a good example of an effective age-group system is found among the Massai of Kenya, in East Africa, where the duty of the *moran* age-set is to keep cattle and community safe. The overall control of this age-set, like with any other, rests with the elders—men who had been *moran* themselves at an earlier stage of their lives and now had the authority to impose their moral and political judgment upon the actions of incumbent members of the *moran* (John Reader).

6. Do you have specialized homes for your old people?

In Africa, grand and great grandparents live on their own, or with their children, and this is a great honor to the children who take the best care of them until death. Whether they are on their own or with their children, it is culturally the children's responsibility to provide for their aged parents and elders until their death. Our grandparents and elders are the custodians of our culture, and so when they spend their last days with any of their children, they spend time training their grandchildren and educating the entire family on the ways of the land. Like true authorities, they counsel the young on many issues that the young think they know how to handle, but have proven themselves not yet prepared. These grandparents and elders, sometimes even act as arbiters in family disputes and the like. Because of their strategic role in the family, it is hard to see a time when Africa's culture will commercialize catering for their old people on a large scale akin to what is encountered in the West. Our elders are family, the joys and blessings of their children's homes. Some business minded people are bound to try commercializing catering for the old in Africa, like most else that is Western now creeping into the continent, but whether or not it will flourish is left for time to prove.

7. How do you treat your senior citizens in Africa?

In the countries of Africa, age accords respect and, to a certain extent, power and authority, especially over those who are younger. Unlike in the West, where people do all they can to fight against aging, and increasingly empower the youth even at the detriment

of the aged, Africans are proud of the aging process and relate to it with grace because of the dignity and authority it brings them in society. As Malidoma Patrice Somé rightly puts it:

For most traditional African cultures, an elder is one whom the village acknowledges as having reached not only a state of old age but also a state of maturity and wisdom. Elders are repositories of tribal knowledge and life experience, essential resources for the survival of the village, anchoring it firmly to the living foundation of tradition. The old and elder are the most revered members of the village community and its greatest preservers and nurturers. It is natural that everyone should be attracted by age, to becoming old. (123-124)

It is not surprising, then, to hear people use their age to assert their authority in the presence of younger people. The Yoruba of Nigeria are unsurpassed when it comes to displaying respect to an older person. Summarily speaking, a son greeting his parent or any other elder, has to prostrate before him or her while uttering his verbal salutation, whereas a daughter in the same situation will go down on both knees as she greets. This is so genuine and so much part of the culture that it is only normal to see a young woman talking to an elder over the phone genuflecting as she greets, completely oblivious of the fact that the elder is not physically present; it is enough that she can hear her and so she must accord the respect the elder deserves. One might as well add here that in the face of authority, which could be one's boss at work, or just an older colleague even, or at home where it could be a parent or an older sibling, the African is usually humble and submissive, especially if the authority figure is someone he has genuine respect for. It is the culture then to see a subordinate looking at the ground when being addressed by the said authority. From time to time, the subordinate looks up at the authority figure's face—but generally avoids eye-contact—before lowering his eyes again. It is a way of showing that he is alert and paying attention to the authority figure. Unlike in the West, When African's avoid eye contact with an authority figure, it is not an indicator that they are hiding something. It is regrettable to say some of these rich aspects of Africa's culture

are threatened today as some of their sons and daughters, after contact with Western notions of liberty, freedom, and equality, sometimes try to treat their elders with indifference. This is frowned at seriously, yet one cannot help wondering what it will be like when the days for these “been-tos” to become elders will arrive, whether they would remember their own culture or pretend to be “free” and “civilized.”

8. I hear you do not call older people by name. Is this true?

In African communities, the respect for age is paramount. As a result, a younger person cannot just call an elder by his or her name directly. There are special words, akin to “Mr.” or “Mrs.” in English; but these are much more endowed with affection, love, and endearment than formality, and they are used before the person’s name as a sign of respect when referring to an older person. These epithets differ from group to group. The Bali people of Cameroon put the word “Ni” before an older person’s name or may simply call the person *Ni* if he is being directly addressed; the Mankon people of the same area used the expression *Ngia* and so on. Sometimes, depending upon how familiar the one is to the other, words such as “mother,” “father,” and other terms of endearment, even traditional titles, may be used in referring to somebody just as a sign of respect. For example, it is not uncommon to hear somebody—a male—from Kumbo, in Cameroon, being referred to by the traditional title of *Shey* which he has not earned, just as a sign of respect. In the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon, respect for an older person is such a pivotal concept in the people’s worldview that even being older than another person by even just a day determines seniority.

Children

9. Is it true Africans love children?

In African cultures, a member’s status in society changes when, as a married person, he or she begins having children. In the same manner, the new father or mother’s own life virtually ceases to matter

that much to him or her; the main focus in life becomes the well-being of his or her child. An example can be found within the Bamenda region of Cameroon. In this part of the country, for example, a parent does not hesitate to sell or give up his entire wealth if it will guarantee a better future for his children. Parents sell their land, or engage in physically demanding petty business ventures just to sponsor their children through school. Eric Hooglund is saying the same thing about Egypt when he writes:

An individual's social identity was closely linked to his or her status in the network of kin relations. Socializing of children emphasized integration among their kin group. An important goal of marriage was to ensure the continuity of a family. A husband and a wife were not considered a family until they produced their first child. After the child's birth, the parents were addressed as father and mother of Muhammad or Amal, or whatever the name of their child. (124)

The importance of children can also be seen in that it is their arrival that gives meaning to a marriage in Africa. Leon E. Clark's presentation of the marriage system among the Gikuyu is revealing:

In the Gikuyu community marriage and its obligations occupy a position of importance. One of the outstanding features in the Gikuyu system of marriage is the desire of every member of the tribe to build up his own family group, and by this means extend and prolong his father's *mbari* (clan). This results in the strengthening of the tribe as a whole.

On signing the matrimonial contract the marriage ceases to be merely a personal matter, for the contract binds not only the bride and bridegroom, but also their kinsfolk. It becomes a duty to produce children and sexual intercourse between a man and his wife or wives is looked upon as an act of production and not merely as the gratification of a bodily desire....

The desire to have children is deep-rooted in the hearts of both men and women, and on entering into matrimonial union they regard the procreation of children as their first and most sacred duty. A childless marriage in a Gikuyu community is practically a failure.... (2: 141)

The culture of African peoples is such that they stand by their children in every way possible until the children are able to support themselves as adults. Yes, Africans love children so much that it can be said they live for their children. Without a child a parent will consider himself or herself most unfortunate, if not even cursed by God. It is this same love that you will see in an African when he meets with a child anywhere. He wants to hold, hug, touch, and talk to the child, just as a true parent would want to do with his or her child, or any within that age-group; the question of abusing the child does not arise in any way whatsoever. According to Africa's culture, a parent is at once a parent to any child that comes one's way.

10. Why did the children in Africa call Oprah Winfrey “Mama Oprah?”

Ms. Oprah Winfrey was called “Mama Oprah” in South Africa out of respect and nothing else. In South Africa, like in other African cultures, children are brought up to relate to anyone old enough to be their parent in the same manner in which they relate to their parents—respectfully. Respect for authority and age is the cornerstone of the culture, so when the children referred to Ms. Winfrey as “Mama Oprah,” it was a sign of respect and not a way of saying they are her biological children or anything along those lines. It is worthwhile noting also that children in these cultures do not refer to older people, some cases even to older siblings, directly by their names. There is always an epithet of respect and endearment that is placed before or after the older person's name. Kuki Gallmann, an Italian by birth now residing in Kenya, writes in her book *African Nights*: “When I first came to Africa, the people addressed me as Memsaab. In time, they baptized me Nyawera, The One Who Works Hard. Now they call me Mama, because I have chosen to stay, and because I belong” (XV).

11. What do you guys mean when you talk about a child belonging to the whole village?

This has to do with the communal nature of the lifestyle in Africa where everyone is practically everyone's keeper. The communities are usually such that members are, at least, very familiar with every other. As a result, each child becomes answerable to anyone the

age of his or her parents, and every elder becomes responsible for anyone in the community who can pass for his or her child. This atmosphere makes it possible for any elder to treat anyone the age of his children as his child, and for the children to look up to, and display filial respect to anyone the age of a parent. A child being answerable to anyone in a community, who can pass for a parent and vice versa, is virtually what this idea of belonging to the whole village means.

12. Do you spank children in Africa?

Spanking is a *sine qua non* for the culture of discipline that exists in Africa. Think of the biblical “spare the rod and spoil the child” and you have that aspect of Africa in a nutshell. The idea is to correct and not to abuse. I say this because most parents in Africa will tell you how it hurts them to discipline their children by spanking, yet they must do it before someone else, say a policeman, as is mostly the case in the West, has to do it for them. Spanking in most African cultures rarely segues into abuse as it is usually administered by the children’s biological parents and not some adopted dad or mom. This is not to say adopted parents are not responsible, but simply to point out that it is less likely for a normal biological parent to abuse his or her child, unlike some step-parent who might not feel the same kind of love and attachment that a normal biological parent will have for his or her child. Yes, spanking children is part of the ongoing tradition of discipline that exists in Africa. Of children and their upbringing in Africa, Mona Reinhardt-Moore, a Washington woman and official of the Salvation Army who formerly lived for five years in rural Liberia and travels there several times a year, is quoted saying “If I had a choice, I would raise my children in Africa....Back in Washington, children run the family. But in African society, the child serves the family....African mothers love and care for their children but not in the same doting way as in our society. The children turn out better for it.” (Clark 2: 57)

13. Do children dial 9-1-1 in Africa?

No, that is a typical American phenomenon. Africans live in tightly related communities—even within the cities—such that neighbors take care of each other even before the ambulance and

cops can show up, a situation which might last forever, unlike the remarkable five to fifteen minutes response time in the United States. Elders and seniors in Africa play a very strategic role in coordinating and maintaining peace in society, even before the officers of law and order. If there is a problem, more often than not, the eldest person present resolves that problem, and so there is usually no need to bring in the police. It is as a very last resort that a problem gets into the hands of the police.

14. Are the children of Africa all starving?

All the children in Africa are not starving. Just like anywhere else, there are the rich and the poor, the haves and the have-nots. It is true that the face of a malnourished African child foraging through a heap of garbage, with flies exercising freely on his face, has become the portrait of poverty in the West, yet it would have been exactly true and ethically honorable were the world told the conditions under which these children were found—war torn countries, and drought affected regions. No, not all African children are starving, except they happen to be victims of natural or man-made disasters: floods, droughts, or wars; for, just as there are the poor and the have-nots, so too are there the rich and affluent. The situation is virtually the same all over the world—there are those who have and those who are desperately in need—even though other governments, especially in Europe and North America, unlike their African counterparts, are doing a lot to alleviate the situation in their countries. The fact remains that there is hunger in every society where there were or are droughts and/or wars going on, as is the case in the countries of these sampled African children that are always shown the world—Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, to give a few examples.

15. Do you kill twin children in Africa?

In the very distant past, in some African cultures, twin children were considered ill-luck, and so killed. Henning Christoph, Klaus E. Müller and Ute Titz-Müller have observed about twins in parts of Africa:

Twin births are not a rarity. If anything, they are quite frequent, yet such children are not regarded as normal: twins are considered to be a bisexual unity. The Bambara (Bamana)

of Mali believe that Faro, the ‘master of the waters,’ gives twins to people. While Faro imparts to normal children the spiritual substances of relatives who have recently passed away, the soul, or ‘double’ (dya), of twins never leaves the waters, but always remains with Faro and is for that reason free from danger and impurity. Each twin is the ‘double’ of the other, and in so being form (sic) a kind of replica of Faro. Their birth is therefore a blessing and intended only for the privileged....

There is also the belief that both children owe their life to the influences of evil spirits, and for that reason they were once killed at birth. In some places twins are still associated with bush spirits, which also appear in pairs. (198-200)

At the same time, in other African communities, twin children were considered a special blessing and the parents were and are still automatically accorded special titles of respect which serve to alert anyone in the community of this gift to them. The Ngemba speaking ethnic groups of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon, for example, give the title *Tangye* (or *Tanyi*) to the father to twins, and to the mother *Mangye* (or *Manyi*). These are simply titles of respect that alert others to the fact that these are parents of a set of twins or more, mindful of the reverence shown twins in the community. Anyone meeting a couple for the first time and hearing them addressed thus, would at once know they have at least a set of twins in the family.

Colonialism

16. Was Africa ever colonized?

Yes, Africa was most voraciously colonized, especially after the early travelers there came in contact with the beautiful weather conditions in most parts of the continent, her agricultural wealth and potentials, and subsequently her mineral resources—Africa’s natural wealth so to speak. It was a kind of “gold rush” as Western countries scurried and jostled against each other in an attempt to grab whatever they could of this continent’s territories. European

countries, through colonialism, transformed Africa into a source for raw materials, and, in time, the market for their finished products. As revealed by Adam Hochschild, even before returning finished goods back to Africa, colonizing nations made huge profits from Africa's raw materials abroad:

In 1897, for example, one of the companies, the Anglo-Belgian India Rubber and Exploitation Company, or A.B.I.R., spent 1.35 francs per kilo to harvest rubber in the Congo and ship it to the company's headquarters at Antwerp—where it was sold for prices that sometimes reached 10 francs per kilo, a profit of more than 700 per cent. (160)

Every aspect of the continent of Africa was exploited—the weather, the land, and the people themselves, on whom were visited shameful techniques to make them work for nothing, or at best next to nothing for pilfering Western nations. A good example is Belgium and the carnage King Leopold and his accomplices caused in the so-called Belgian Congo, which, ironically, was originally referred to as the Congo Free State. Bill Berkeley's words best sum up the cataclysmic dimensions of the abuse, loss, pain, sorrows—physical and psychological—Leopold caused the people in the name of colonialism:

The worst genocide in recorded African history was perpetrated not by the Africans but by the Belgians, in what came to be known as the Belgian Congo—Europe's richest colony in Africa and the actual setting for Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Between 1885 and 1912 King Leopold's private army, composed primarily of African conscripts led by European officers, shot, starved, and worked to death between 5 million and 10 million native inhabitants. (9)

It must be remembered that this was the activity of one man, representing one colonizing nation; one can only imagine what the picture would look like, were it possible to compile together the atrocities of all the colonizing nations. Yes, Africa was most painfully colonized.

17. What do they mean when they say Africa is being exploited?

This is a very intricate question, such that one can only attempt a rather vague answer here mindful of the scope of this work. By exploitation, we mean making productive use of someone, his talents and resources wrongfully; that is, without the person's consent or awareness. Therefore, to begin with, if one should go back to the slave trade era, then one would realize that some of Africa's best sons and daughters, a very significant portion of the continent's labor force, were forcefully carted off to Europe and the Americas. Shortly after the collapse of the slave trade, Africa's wealth in terms of raw materials and minerals was also carried away for free by different European nations—Belgium, Portugal, France, and Britain are some of the greatest offenders. Reader again paints a rather vivid picture of the exploitation of Africa in the name of trade with Europe:

The so-called 'legitimate trade' consisted of supplying Europe with raw materials and commodities that were expensive or unobtainable elsewhere: palm-oil, gold, ivory, hardwoods, rubber, wax, and gum Arabic; Africans were encouraged to grow introduced crops such as groundnuts, sugar, cocoa and tea, cloves and cinnamon for the European markets, as well as the indigenous coffee and coconuts. (435)

A lot more than Reader has presented was carried out of Africa by the West. Ironically, these are civilized nations that claimed they had gone into Africa to bring civilization to a part of the world where it was yet to arrive. Belgium's Leopold II was a pioneering brain in this deceit of the world. At a come-together that he had organized—the Brussels Geographical Conference of 12-14th September 1876 as it was referred to—during which Leopold II was able to present himself as a philanthropist instead of the ambitious, pilfering opportunist he was, he lied to those present at the opening session:

Gentlemen...

The subject which brings us together today is one of those which deserve to take a leading place in engaging the attention of the friends of humanity. To open up to civilization the

only part of our globe which it has not yet penetrated, to pierce the darkness in which entire populations are enveloped, is, I venture to say, a crusade worthy of this age of progress, and I am happy to perceive how much the public feeling is in favour of its accomplishment; the tide is with us. (Reader, 531)

Leopold had thus started a trend that was to survive for generations after him—presenting Africa in any light as a means to achieving personal and national wealth in the name of philanthropy for the backward suffering black peoples of the continent. But Leopold's skeletons were, before long, exposed when his true exploitation of the wealth of the Congo was in full force. By this time, it was already late, as other philanthropic-cum-pilfering efforts like those by the French, were already in place. The atrocities of the Belgian venture in the Congo, to say the least, were criminal. According to Walter Rodney in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*,

The Portuguese and the Belgian colonial regimes were the most brazen in directly rounding up Africans to go and work for private capitalists under conditions equivalent to slavery. In Congo, brutal and extensive forced labour started under King Leopold in the last century. So many Congolese were killed and maimed by Leopold's officials and police that this earned European disapproval even in the midst of the general pattern of colonial outrages. When Leopold handed over to the Belgian government in 1908, he had already made a huge fortune; and the Belgian government hardly relaxed the intensity of exploitation of the Congo. (182-183)

What a lesson in civilization for the Africans! John Reader highlights the lesson further:

Leopold displayed exceptional generosity in the disbursement of his newfound wealth. The Congo profits were used to fund a grandiose policy of public works and urban improvement—in Belgium. The magnificent Arcade du Cinquantenaire in Brussels, the famous Tervuren Museum, extensions to the Royal Palace, public works at Ostend, various urban building schemes – all were funded by the Congo Free State.

In 1901, the flow of funds from the Congo was even institutionalized. The ‘celebrated’ Fondation de la Couronne was established and granted a land concession in the Congo that covered 250,000 km² - a tenth of the entire state, eight times the size of Belgium. The products of the concession—mainly wild rubber—brought in a very high annual income, which the Foundation applied exclusively to public works in Belgium itself. A programme of long term and ‘truly magnificent’ projects was embarked upon. The face of Brussels was to be transformed, and large tracts of urban land were acquired for the purpose. On completion, the buildings immediately became the property of the Belgian State, along with all the land which the Foundation had purchased. In all, the Belgian nation received property worth more than

£ 2,400,000 from the Foundation. (544)

Today, the problem of exploiting is still rife, but with a significant modification: in addition to material exploitation, there is now the dimension of brain-drain, as Africa’s best brains that ought to assist in the genuine effort to “develop” the continent are forced to flee their countries because of corrupt Western-backed dictatorial regimes that have left so many true patriots dead.

The exploitation of Africa, it is now obvious, is a reference to the predatory and immoral practice of foreign individuals, organizations, and nations, invading Africa—aggressively or subtly, overtly or covertly—and making away with the continent’s resources without thinking of the inhabitants and the consequences this could have on them during and after the perpetration of such crimes. And they do this whilst damning Africa as poor, backward, uncivilized, and with nothing to offer.

18. I hear all the time that Africans fought wars for European nations when they had no business being involved in these wars. What is that about?

That is correct. After the colonization of Africa by the West, many of Africa’s fore-fathers were recruited and trained to serve as policemen protecting Western administrators and their arbitrary

administrative units in the colonies, or as soldiers who were used by the colonialist to fight and subdue other Africans and their territories. These soldiers were also made to fight for the colonial nations during major European wars such as WWI and II. It must be remembered that these wars were called “World Wars” because the battles were fought almost all over the world and not because the whole world was involved in them, nor were all those fighting from different parts of the world perpetrators or stakeholders in the wars. The first shots of World War I, for example, were fired in the Anglo-French invasion of Togo, which began thereafter; the subsequent surrender of the German forces on August 26, 1914, was the first allied victory. What had the Africans to do with this war, and why was it being fought on African soil? According to John Reader,

A survey of the First World War and its consequences in Africa concluded that more than 2.5 million Africans, or nearly 2 per cent of the population of the continent, were involved in war work of some kind. ‘The slave trade at its height never reached a tenth of the numbers involved in any one year.’ *It was a war that Africa had done nothing to provoke and from which Africa had nothing to gain.* For every African that was directly involved with the war, another dozen of his kin – men, women, and children – were affected by it. (607 emphasis mine)

Even within the colonies, these African regiments were used in suppressing other ethnic groups resisting colonial infiltration. In other words, Africans were used to kill other Africans in the name of fighting for kings and queens, or for some other bogus cause. In this case, the commanding officers were from the colonizing country whereas members of the rank and file were “natives” whose death, the numbers notwithstanding, meant nothing to the colonizing country. The native units were brainwashed to think and believe they belonged to the empire, in the case of Britain, and that they were answerable to the queen. Accordingly, during the world wars, they fought on the side of the colonizing nation and died, unacknowledged, in their numbers. In Martin Meredith’s words,

Thousands of African troops were recruited for war service. From British territories, some 374,000 Africans served in the British army. African units helped to defeat the Italians in

Ethiopia and to restore Emperor Haile Selassie to his throne. African regiments were sent to India and fought with distinction in Burma.... From French Africa some 80,000 troops were shipped to France to fight against the Germans. (8-9)

Janice Hamilton is more specific in authenticating this fact: “During World War I, (1914-1918), Nigerian troops fought in German held Cameroon” (26). She later on adds that “Nigerian troops proved their worth again during World War II (1939-1945), fighting alongside the British in East Africa and Burma” (26). So Africans fighting wars for Western nations from which they benefitted nothing, nor had they anything to do with the starting of the war, only goes a long way to complete the picture of the exploitation of Africa in the name of civilization.

19. How has colonialism affected Africa?

To answer this question satisfactorily calls for the writing of another book. However, briefly, and generally speaking, colonialism, overall, has had very negative effects on Africa in spite of what some writers and propagandists would love the world to believe. In fact, contrary to what former colonizing nations claim, colonialism was Africa’s death sentence, given the number of conflicts brewing in Africa today because of colonialist activities on the continent. First of all, colonialism deprived Africans from exploring their potentials and developing according to their needs—that is naturally. Colonialism, mindful of the fact that their native European countries were the main concern of the colonialists, immediately attempted halting everything African in an effort to replace these things with European values; this has made Africa almost entirely dependent on the West today. Leon E. Clark elaborates on this same point:

Colonialism is usually given the credit for bringing modern technological culture to Africa. It is true, of course, that the Europeans built modern schools and hospitals, introduced scientific techniques of agriculture and industry, improved communications and transportation, and in general infused modern Western culture into traditional societies. But is it true that Africa needed colonialism in order to get these things? A number of scholars today would say no. They argue that

Africa would have modernized anyway through normal trade contacts with Europe, which had gone on for centuries. In fact, these scholars argue, Africa would have developed naturally, and with its own interests in mind. As it turned out, under colonialism, Africa modernized according to European plans, which seldom put the interests of Africa first. (1:131)

African languages, for example, were often suppressed to the point of being declared illegal in certain circumstances and venues. To further prepare Africa as a market for finished European goods, African products that had European alternatives suddenly became illegal; this was typical of consumer products such as drinks and cigarettes. In Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal*, for example, one reads how the locals struggle to have a sip of their local brew "arki" (6-9), which had been declared illegal, and in its stead imported and more expensive Western gin introduced.

A more vicious effect of colonialism has to do with what was done to the African mind during this period—the colonialists transformed Africans almost into zombies as they fed them all kinds of disturbingly misleading ideas about the white man being better and superior to the black person. It took generations of brave Africans to repair this damage significantly, the side-effects of which are still lingering on today. There are still some Africans who, for example, will prefer a white high school dropout carrying out a certain responsibility to a black person who is better qualified. This amounts to that perfect example of what Kevin Kertscher describes as Africa's version of racism, which surprised him, but he is quick to point out that it is a leftover of the colonial mentality. It must be pointed out, however, that even besides the "racism" Kertscher is referring to, most African cultures have a hospitable manner of relating to strangers in their midst. This hospitable disposition might be confused with this kind of "racism," as it also amounts to giving the stranger the best that can be afforded, as that is what Africans do to their guests.

If one's mind is tampered with to the point where one cannot have confidence in oneself, now that is damage big time. This game on the African mind is going on even today, as black people all over the world are made to think they are capable of nothing good. Africa has been carefully manipulated into the position of the world's

laughing stock and to further this portrait, it is being suggested that globalization should pass Africa by, while everyday one hears of the West's favorite cliché - "Aid for Africa." Can anyone tell why today the West that is so altruistic and willing to do all for this limping continent charges exorbitant flight fares to Africa which is closer to the West than Australia is, while flights to Australia cost far less comparatively speaking? The average flight to an African country today is about \$2500.00 round trip, whereas to Australia it is about \$1500.00, or to China barely \$800.00 (Fluctuating gas prices today have made these rates highly unstable), yet the trip to Africa is only about half the time it takes to get to Australia or to most Asian destinations. Forget about that old and worn out excuse of these African routes being less traveled; not the case any longer, nor are these routes necessarily daily routes. One encounters similar disparities in the charges levied for phone calls to Africa as opposed to other Western and Asian destinations. How it is that the West came in to Africa, exploited her wealth and carted away her sons and daughters, only to leave Africa in debt to the West, one cannot help wondering. In most simplistic terms, think of somebody who claims to be visiting; he makes use of his host's buildings for shelter, he uses his host's surround sound system for his entertainment, uses his boiler for his comfort, sells flowers and fruits from his host's gardens and orchards for his financial upkeep, uses his host's horses and servants to run his errands, his host's sons as forced labor, and his host's wife and daughters for sexual comfort, only to leave and claim his host is indebted to him. Yet that is Africa's plight today and it is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the devastating effects of colonialism on the continent of Africa.

Were there good things brought about by colonialism? I can hardly see them as such, for most things that might appear good today were done as a process towards facilitating the draining of Africa's wealth while at once destroying her culture and not because Westerners truly cared for Africa or for the African. As Peter Schwab rightly points out:

The fascism of the colonial experience entailed removing the colonized from history by denying that they were subjects of history; usurping any role the colonized may have wished to play, negating their objective political and personal importance by destroying their humanity; socializing the colonized to

internalize their inferiority; manipulating the occupied peoples to accept the fact that they were 'out of the game'. (16)

Schwab is later to conclude:

Overall, then, colonialism was a terribly destructive force. It vanquished societies and individuals. It created African elites, functionally removing them from traditional society, but refusing to permit them to assimilate; the result was a new culture of Africans who fit comfortably in neither one community nor the other.

The colonial experience is emblematic of man's inhumanity to man and woman. (20)

20. Are Africans angry at the results of colonialism?

It is only right to claim that Africans are angry because of all that colonialism has done to them. It almost deprived Africans of their identity while their wealth was, and is still being, carted away to the West by people who presented themselves as friends and visitors, only to turn extortionists overnight. Africans are therefore bitter about the effects of the experience—colonialism had the peoples of Africa divided into strange groups that the West thought they could call states; it forced upon the people foreign languages and values such as English, French, and Portuguese on the one hand, and Western religious, legal, marital, and trading practices; it brought about tension and battles between people who had lived side by side for generations, in some cases with little or no problems. This becomes more obvious when it is remembered that colonies were formed with little regard for the boundaries of existing traditional societies. As a result, people within a single community found themselves ruled by more than one European administrator, while others were suddenly required to share power with different groups—sometimes their old enemies (Moss and Wilson xxiii). The gun and gun powder was then supplied to keep the problems simmering even until today, while these perpetrators appear to stand back and with all good intentions, supposedly, wonder at Africa's ostensible incapability to manage herself.

21. Isn't it true that there was slavery in Africa before the coming of Europeans?

Very true, there was slavery in Africa before the coming of Europeans. This, however, is a very weak excuse often used by those trying to shirk the full blame of slavery from the shoulders of Westerners who did not only perpetrate such evil but raised it to industrial proportions. Those who posit this view fail to let out the whole truth, which is that slavery before the invasion of Africa by the West was not only an African but a universal phenomenon. And the slaves being referred to here, more often than not, were persons defeated in battle and taken as captives who were then expected to serve their conquerors and in the process could gain their freedom and become full members of the ethnic group that had conquered them in battle. The point here, in any cases, is the fact that Westerners transformed slavery to what it was not before, by industrializing it. Edward Bever observes accordingly: "Slavery was common in ancient and medieval Africa, just as it was in Europe, Asia, and America. When an army took prisoners in a war, the captors had the captives at their mercy. They could kill them if they wanted; they could let them go if they felt like it (or for a ransom); or they could put them to work" (23). According to George S. Fichter, in the case of Africa, these slaves could eventually become free by work and being of good conduct; they also got their freedom if they married a member of the tribe holding them captive (3). So, although there was slavery in Africa before the coming of Westerners, the latter raised it to an unprecedented level of notoriety as they left the victims no chance of earning their freedom while treating them as beasts.

Communication

22. I hear Africans use a lot of proverbs when they talk. Is that true?

Very true! Within a typical traditional milieu, Africans use a lot of proverbs and other rich sayings to communicate, especially when arguing with peers, during important deliberations, or when trying to instruct the young on the ways of the land. These proverbs display

not only mastery of the language, but also the speaker's authority over the topic of discourse, as proverbs confirm and neatly present or defend situations that arise within the African's world. Chinua Achebe, one of Africa's leading novelists, has indicated the strategic nature of the use of proverbs succinctly when he points out that proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten. His novels display the authenticity of this claim. In *No Longer at Ease*, an elder, in an effort to establish Obi Okonkwo's strategic position as a product of the village of Mafia, declares during an emergency meeting held by the Umofia Progressive Union: "An only palm fruit does not get lost in the fire" (14). Such a proverb is loaded with meaning that one can only explain one dimension of it at a time. On this occasion, it might mean "one's eyes are always on something that one cherishes"; and this, as earlier explained, is only a faint picture of the meanings communicated by that single proverb. Besides proverbs, there are many other figures of speech that enrich the daily linguistic patterns of African speech. My late grandfather, on the morning of the day of his death, said to my now late father, "That tree will come down today." The richness of this expression is seen when it is understood that he was the head of the family and like the giant baobab tree, which provides shelter and protection to those sitting under it, he protected and provided for the members of his family—siblings, children, and grand children—and without that tree, his family would be exposed like a yard without the sheltering and nourishing baobab. The use of proverbs and such rich language displays the very philosophical nature of African societies.

23. How come some Africans speak English perfectly but others do not?

This has to do with the country that colonized that particular African nation. If the people were colonized by the Belgians, for example, then it is only natural that instead of English the colonized would speak French, since the language of the colonizer became the administrative language of the colonized territory. This is the same for Portuguese and Italian. It must be remembered that the natives were coerced and sometimes forced into abandoning their ways for those of the colonialists for ridiculous rewards such as

citizenship of the colonizing nation or seats in their parliaments where, of course, these African parliamentarians were of little or no consequence, as in the case of France and her *assimilés*.

Again, besides the language of the colonizers, Africans speak their native languages. Of the multi-linguistic nature of most Africans Edward Bever observes:

Approximately 2,000 ... ethnic units are found in Africa, far more than on any other continent. These groups speak 750 different languages, and over 1,000 dialects. Despite the formation of ostensibly national states during decolonization, there is little prospect that the number of ethnic groups will decline rapidly. The languages of the ex-colonial powers are generally used for official business, so education does not reinforce a predominant national language, but creates a bilingual situation in which people speak their traditional tongue at home. (251)

What Bever does not point out is the fact that many people speak not only one other African language but often more. These are the languages which they used before the European usurpation of Africa. The average African, therefore, speaks approximately two different languages—one African language, and one belonging to the colonial intruder. This bilingual, and sometimes multi-lingual, characteristic of the African is bound to lead to linguistic interference as one language, sooner or later, will begin influencing the speaker's pronunciation or fluency in another language. The colonizing nation therefore was the determining factor as to which European language African nations spoke upon gaining their independence. It is for this reason that some Africans speak English or French or Portuguese without any difficulties, while others have to begin learning the one or the other when they decide to settle in an English, French, or Portuguese nation accordingly.

24. Do you have phones in Africa?

Yes, there are phones in Africa, but the technology in most places is not top of the line. The need to further develop this has now been challenged, however, with the emergence of cell phones. Virtually everyone, teenagers and adults, now owns a cell phone,

and so people do not care about getting lines installed in their homes any longer. Yes, cell phones are everywhere and in virtually every hand, as is the case anywhere else on earth. There is this joke about cell phones being so common that even hard working market women (*buyam-sellam* they are called locally), have their phones with them even as they chase vehicles with fresh loads of grocery items from the fields which they buy to turn around and sell for profit. It is the same with those who practice subsistence agriculture for survival and are always in the fields working; everybody laughs at the changes when ever once in a while a cell phone rings in the farms where a few years before landlines for phones did not exist.

25. Does “black” stand for evil in Africa too?

In many cases it does, and this is because the language and worldview “gunned” into Africans during the colonial era belonged to Europeans who passed them on along with their biases. There are moments in Africa, however, when “white” stands for evil. People, for example, always talk about one being “white” when one is seriously sick and anemic as a way of showing the gravity of the situation, and it is also common to paint the image of an evil ghost appearing all in white. Leon E. Clark must have found this out before entitling a chapter of his book “Too White, Like a Devil” (vol. 1), and before going on to observe forcefully: “Bear in mind that white skin is a sign of illness in Africa, and that evil spirits are often depicted as white” (1: 123). This notwithstanding, the association of black and evil is predominant. Of recent, however, Africans have begun modifying English as a language such that it communicates Africa also and not Europe only.

Crime

26. Are there murders in Africa like we experience them here in the US?

Before the ills of capitalism and the rat race, crime was incredibly unusual, and this is because of the intimate nature of most African societies. These societies were usually so small that every member of society knew the other. As a result, before any tension,

misunderstanding, or illness (mental), escalated to a point that it led to any kind of crime, it was resolved beforehand. Another deterrent to crime was the fact that the deeds of an individual had repercussions way beyond the sphere of the individual alone onto that of his or her entire family. Because of the need to protect a family's integrity, therefore, it was really difficult to hear of serious crimes such as murders, rape, pedophilia, and the like.

A person is never an individual within the worldview of most African societies; he or she is always a member of a tight family and an equally tight ethnic group, although the latter is changing today with more inter-ethnic marriages taking place. The result is that people always thought of the consequences of their deeds on their families before doing anything stupid, because society was very drastic in the way it treated certain actions considered taboo and/or criminal, for example, child molestation, suicide, and murder. In most cases, the punishment was exile from the community. Someone (an adult) who committed a serious crime like sexually abusing a child, for example, a rare crime in most African cultures, was not only exiled from the community, but had his family at once stigmatized, because nobody would let members of his or her family have anything to do with the family of the offender. One could therefore go for decades, or even live one's life to the end without hearing of murder, incest, and crimes of that nature. With colonialism came contacts with other strange cultures and judicial systems that made excuses for such offenders. The result was that some of these crimes became more frequent than my grandfather could ever have imagined. Things are still changing and not for good; murder is now more commonplace than before, and most of the time it has to do with robbery.

27. Americans hate lies; is it the same in Africa?

Yes, it is the same in Africa, even though things are beginning to change, as is the case with much else on the continent. It is very African to say a man does not lie to his son (Achebe, *Arrow* 105), but with democracy and politics after traditions of the West, African men of honor have learned to look at one in the face and tell lies. Such behavior no longer has any consequences on the perpetrator, as was the case in Africa before Western style administration took

over. The times are changing, and so things unheard of in the past are now becoming almost routine occurrences. These behaviors seem to be normal in the name of politics, or better still multi-party democracy, which is Western. Even in North America, with well established administrative structures, multi-party democracy has its problems as often seen during elections at least. After confirming that there was as much electoral malfeasance in 2004 as there was in 2000, Paul Krugman writes of the American situation:

Meanwhile, the whitewash of what happened in Florida in 2000 showed that election-tampering carries no penalty, and political operatives have acted accordingly. For example, in 2002 the Republican Party in New Hampshire hired a company to jam Democratic and union phone banks on Election Day. (AA6)

This is certainly not only dirty electoral practices, it is unhealthy democracy. He had earlier pointed out in the article how few Americans have heard potentially disturbing facts characterizing the 2000 presidential elections which according to him, as documented by Andrew Gumbel (a US correspondent for the British newspaper, *The Independent*) in his book *Steal This Vote*, was marred by irregularities. Yet it is this multi-party democracy which Western politicians cannot wait to prescribe to Africans; a practice that encourages lies and scandals unlike Africa's traditional political practices—gerontocracy, for example.

28. Is it legal to own guns in Africa?

To be able to own a gun in most African countries, one needs a gun permit which is not easily acquired as most governments are trying to keep these weapons out of the reach of people who might use them wrongly. However, in some African countries that have experienced wars, guns are very much part of the society since there is no way of ensuring that all the weapons are taken back by the authorities when the war is over. In any case, with the new trend of violent crimes, many people are acquiring and keeping guns for their protection, even without permits from their governments. This is the case because these Western styled governments have lost credibility in the eyes of the citizens because of the level of corruption which cuts across the entire administrative structure from

top to bottom—administrators forging documents and stealing money from government coffers, policemen teaming up and arming bandits who carry out raids and then bring their own share of the booty and so on. So, although one needs a permit to own a gun in African countries, many people are beginning to own them illegally for self-protection.

Death

29. Do Africans cry when their person dies?

Because of the way Africans bond with their friends, and especially with members of their family, the demise of a friend, but more so that of a family person, is a very painful occurrence. The result is that there is a lot of weeping and wailing involved. Unlike in most of the West, even neighbors in Africa become very strongly connected and with a natural obligation towards each other. Walter Rodney is in line when he points out: “In all African societies during the early epoch, the individual at every stage of life had a series of duties and obligations to others in the society as well as a set of rights: namely, things that he or she could expect or demand from other individuals” (45). It is still very much the situation even though some degree of individualism—a Western influence—is beginning to threaten this atmosphere as is the case with many other areas of traditional African life. This notwithstanding, traditional African ways are still overriding. Accordingly, neighbors visit each other whenever they feel like it and without the need to first call and alert them, and yet they are always warmly welcomed. When people are this strongly connected, the affairs of one person are the affairs of the other; this brings about a lot of pain and crying when a member of such a society dies.

30. How different is an African funeral?

That is a very huge question in terms of how much needs to be said. In any case, the first thing to know is that the word “funeral” is very limiting as it fails to capture entirely what obtains when a member of society dies in Africa, because of the elaborate and

equally complicated nature of the rites and other traditional activities that take place. Accordingly, it is more appropriate to talk of a “death-celebration,” commonly referred to in some societies as “cry-die.” This is the case because the nature of a “cy-die” depends on many different factors: the age of the deceased, religious background, and status in society are basic examples. The bottom line is that there is a lot of display of emotions if this were a young person, or a strategic person in the family in terms of being the breadwinner for the family; this is not to say the death of anyone else is of no consequence but simply that it is treated differently.

If the person who dies is fairly old, then instead of the bitter pain displayed at the death of a much younger person, say in his thirties, forties or fifties, there is some weeping mainly because that person will be missed. But before long, the atmosphere turns into one of celebration as it is acknowledged that in any case the person, given his years, had led a long and fulfilling life.

In the case of a baby, in the other extreme, although there is some mourning, the funeral is usually solemn, to acknowledge the fact that a human spirit has passed on, but the community also realizes that there are more chances of having other babies since the parents are still alive. Again, this does not mean the child’s life was not valued; no, it is a way of consoling the parents by making them realize that not much had gone into this baby yet, besides the tedious months the mother spent carrying him/her in her womb. It is to say it could have been more devastating if the family had spent time and resources grooming this child into a young adult and getting used to him or her as a member of the family, only for the child to die, or if the mother had also died in the process of child birth.

Accordingly, African “death-celebrations” have phases depending on the status of the deceased person in his/her society. In the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon, for example, there is the first phase—when the death has just occurred—that has a lot pain and weeping involved. Then there is the next phase, almost immediately before and after the deceased has been interred, which is marked by a celebration characterized by “feasting” on the part of friends and family alike as they honor the departure of a soul, and his or her achievements here on earth if the person is advanced in age. It is worth noting, however, that treating African “funerals” is beyond

the scope of this venture as the factors that come into play in different circumstances, add different shades to the nature of an “African funeral”.

31. What do you do with your dead in Africa? Are they cremated?

Briefly, in most African cultures, it is our hope that our dead can join their ancestors in the world beyond. The difference lies in how the deceased is prepared for, and sent on this journey into the world of his ancestors. The person's age, sex, status in society and even the manner of death are some of the numerous factors that shape his or her burial.

It has, therefore, always been the practice in Africa for the dead to be buried rather than cremated. In this way, African communities are able to stay connected to their deceased relatives through certain traditional rites and ceremonies performed from time to time, and on particular occasions at the grave of the deceased person. The pouring of libation as a form of prayer to invoke the deceased person's services from the spirit world, just like Christians pray to spiritual personages, is just an example. Sometimes traditional burial practices are carried out side by side with the Christian method; this is the African's plight ever since he was transformed into a cultural hybrid by his encounter with the West.

32. How do Africans bury people?

Again, this is another very complex area traditionally, as it varies from ethnic group to ethnic group, and whether or not one has bought into Christianity or otherwise. Again, the deceased person's status in his traditional society and the manner of his death are some of the influential factors. For example, if the deceased is a traditional leader, his burial is different from that of an ordinary member of the tribe. If death is not natural, say by suicide, again the manner of burial is different. Is it a child who has died, a pregnant woman, a newborn? These different factors influence the burial rite, and in some cases how the deceased is positioned in his or her grave. Robert J. Thornton's recordings on death and the treatment of the dead among the Iraqw of Tanzania amounts to a good illustration of how complex burial practices can be amongst certain African peoples given the diverse factors that are brought to bear:

Funerals are not important foci of ceremonial observance. The dead are dealt with quickly. Young children who die are rarely buried. Their bodies are left in the bush where they are consumed by the hyena. I am told that in the past, all persons with the exception of important ritual specialists were also disposed of in this manner. Ritual specialists were buried with graves marked with heaps of earth and beer offering were made to their spirits (*gi*)....Today, I am told that the dead are simply and quietly buried near the doorway of the house that they occupied in life. (180)

There is so much, therefore, that comes into play when different culture groups of Africa bury people, and there are certain unique peculiarities as one moves from age to gender to social status and from one ethnic group to another.

33. Is suicide common in Africa?

Comparatively speaking, no! To take one's life, unlike the case with the Romans or the Japanese samurai, is a terrible thing within the belief patterns of many African societies. The result is that it brings along disregard for the family of the deceased, to the extent that families might not be willing to associate themselves in any way with the family of a suicide victim. Parents will say "no" to their children even getting married to anyone whose family has been tarnished by any taboo such as suicide. Suicide does occur from time to time, but it is extremely rare indeed.

34. What is the life expectancy in Africa?

This varies from country to country. According to a posting from the new World Health Report of the World Health Organization (WHO) released in the year 2000, due primarily to the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, life expectancies for African children have dropped significantly:

...the WHO calculated life expectancy for babies born in 1999 based upon an indicator developed by WHO scientists, Disability Adjusted Life Expectancy (DALE). DALE summarizes the expected number of years to be lived in what is termed the equivalent of "full health." To calculate DALE,

the years of ill-health are weighted according to severity, and subtracted from the expected overall life expectancy to give the equivalent years of healthy life....

All of the bottom 10 countries were in sub-Saharan Africa, where the HIV-AIDS epidemic is rampant. In ascending order beginning with 191, those countries were Sierra Leone (sic) 25.9 years, years of healthy for babies born in 1999; Niger, 29.1; Malawi 29.4; Zambia, 30. Botswana 32.3; Uganda 32.7; Rwanda, 32.8; Zimbabwe, 32.9; Mali, 33.1 and Ethiopia 33.5" ("Africa: Life Expectancy")

So, in all, whereas some people live long lives comparatively speaking, there are others whose lifespan is really short. Some texts have put Africa's life expectancy at 59 by 1990, but I have come to lose faith even in statistical so-called details about Africa as I am now convinced that figures are man-made and can be cooked up by different bodies to serve whatever purpose they have in hand at the time. Such statistics will reveal the life span, like much else about Africa, to be dismal if that's what they want it to be at the time.

Before the AIDS epidemic, death was known to be a guest in the quarters of the aged only, but the trend is certainly no longer the same as even the very young die nowadays due to AIDS.

The Diaspora

35. Do Africans dislike African-Americans?

No, contrary to what seems to be the consensus, Africans do not dislike African-Americans; this is unthinkable. I must observe here that earlier writers had made such suggestions in the past, and this, no doubt about it, strained the feelings of brotherhood and sisterhood that did exist, still exists, and ought to exist between Africans and African-Americans since both groups were (miss)educated to think they disliked each other. Victor C. Ferkiss is one such writer, and one cannot help wondering the source of such views when he claims in response to the question "...whether Africans really liked and respected American Negroes [.]” (313) that “Negroes tend to insist that they have a special rapport with Africans

based on a common racial background, while many Africans are privately highly critical of American Negroes whom they regard as lacking in ability and in pride" (313).

For Ferkiss to have stated this is unfortunate. Why would Africans have aired these views privately as if, like kids, they were afraid of somebody giving them a good spanking, such that it was Ferkiss who had to leak it out for them? By the 1960s when Ferkiss was spreading such damaging views, Africans were themselves in no better position than the African-American, as the former were still fighting to free themselves from the yoke of Western colonialism (they are yet to succeed). Where then did they get the time from, or the feeling of superiority to be able to grant such a perspective to Ferkiss, of African-Americans as "lacking in ability and in pride?" Ferkiss must have forgotten that Africans are still aware of the fact that it was their very best who were captured and who could make it across the great waters, mindful of how they were treated like animals. In fact, at the point in time when Ferkiss wrote this, African-Americans had a lot to pride themselves for: they had been snatched away from their homeland and enslaved for generations by the Westerner, but they were far ahead in the struggles to free themselves, whereas Africans who were at home were barely beginning similar struggles towards freedom, otherwise termed independence.

The results of a study by Francis T. McAndrew and Adebawale Akande confirm my claims. The duo observes that their study attempted to further the understanding of the basis of American stereotypes held by non-Americans by asking a large number of Africans for their perceptions of African and European Americans. Because of previous studies which had indicated that African-Americans were usually stereotyped negatively by others, they wanted to determine the extent to which this was true of people with whom they share a common ancestry. According to the twosome: "The results indicated that the Africans surveyed did not hold negative stereotypes of African Americans. Indeed, with the exception of being seen as more superstitious, African American stereotypes were more positive than those of European Americans, with African Americans perceived as more friendly, polite, religious, and generous." (654)

Many Western scholars on Africa have been more damaging in their effort to portray Africa in a certain manner while others have been more subtle, and to worsen the situation, their books, except recently, never made it to Africa where they could be more effectively reviewed through African eyes, since it is about them that the books are written. One can only imagine the damaging consequences of such views to the already existing bond between African-Americans and Africans.

No, Africans harbor no feelings of disrespect for the African-American. Even as children, Africans are trained to understand we are one, and but for a stroke of luck, it could have been Mbeki in America today, instead of Tyrone. Even when children call those African-Americans revisiting slave sites in Africa “white people,” it is not intended to disrespect them as these children are only struck by that fact that their accents remind them of white people. Africans who, having spent much time as residents in the West, return to Africa for a visit and sound European are also referred to as white people and often ridiculed even for sounding White.

Ferkiss’ view could only have been accepted by someone without an understanding of African ethics. Africans rarely support an oppressor and more so when the victim is their own; to have said anything against the African-American would have been doing just that. It is this spirit that Chinua Achebe is exposing in his novel *Arrow of God*, when a child, Obielue, is beaten up by his parents, for directing Captain Winterbottom’s emissaries to the house of Ezeulu, the Chief priest of *Ulu*. A man, out of duress, had told the emissaries after escorting them to the approaches of Ezeulu’s compound: “It is not our custom... to show our neighbour’s creditors the way to his hut. So I cannot enter with you.” This is exactly what the boy Obielue found out the hard way:

Fortunately a little boy came in at that moment with a small piece of potsherd to take burning coals to his mother for making a fire. It was the boy who took the men around the bend of the footpath to Ezeulu’s compound. As soon as he went out with them, the old woman picked up her stick and hobbled over at an amazing speed to his mother’s hut to report his behaviour. Then she returned to her hut – much more slowly, curved behind her straight stick.... Soon after she got back she heard the boy, Obielue, crying. (171-172)

Africans have forever been sympathetic towards the predicament of the African-American, and not in a patronizing manner as Ferkiss' words suggest; to state otherwise is unfortunate.

Little disagreements that do occur between both groups must not be misunderstood and taken for "hate" or lack of respect; nothing could be further from the truth, as even siblings from the same mother do disagree from time to time. The point in the relationship between the African and the African-American is that there is some frustration that occurs when both groups meet, especially for the first time. When they meet, at once both parties assume that because the color of their skin is the same, they are supposed to immediately bond, and without any difficulties. When things turn out differently at first, it is misconstrued and presented as "dislike" or as Africans being arrogant.

It must be understood that because of their skin color, both Africans and African-Americans can immediately identify especially before they begin talking. Then there is a little surprise when they begin talking and the one realizes that the other sounds differently—the African speaking through his/her mouth in the main, while the African-American is coming across with a nasal twang added to taste. This is no problem at all, as both parties are glad to be able to reunite after all these centuries. The unfortunate thing here is that because their skin color blends at once they also expect the same with their values. But this is not always the case, and this expectation, everything taken into consideration, is certainly unrealistic given that members of both groups were brought up under different circumstances. When the superficial differences in values and mannerisms are first experienced, there is no doubt a certain degree of frustration, and in some cases bitterness, which are usually easily corrected once both parties remind themselves of the vast differences of the conditions surrounding their existence on earth. No, it is not a question of "hate." It is simply that no two people living together with different values can live without some misunderstanding even if only for a brief while. Africans' respect and acceptance of their kin in the diaspora is always seen when they visit the mother continent as it happened of recent with President Obama's visit to Africa, and this has very little to do with the African-American's status in society. They are always happily

received and more often than not, emerge with respected traditional titles indicative of the joy shared by the natives upon their returning “home,” albeit for a brief visit.

36. Where from Africa did the slaves come?

Those men and women who were turned into slaves by “civilized” practices of the West were captured from all over the continent of Africa virtually, but especially south of the Sahara, and gathered around coastal areas in readiness for the journey across the oceans. Some African countries, Ghana and Senegal, for example, still have the scars of slave trade activities, but one cannot simply and categorically state that this is where the slaves came from, as the entire region south of the Sahara was continually raided by slave hunters and their agents. Basil Davidson, in keeping with this perspective, has pointed out that

Most of the slaves were undoubtedly from Western Africa. They were taken from about a score of principal markets, and from many smaller ones, on a 3,000 mile coastline between Senegal in the north and Angola in the south. A few were taken from East Africa even in the sixteenth century. (*Black Mother* 104)

37. Do Africans hate Americans?

Only in those African countries where America’s foreign policy has left painful memories will you find a certain degree of hostility towards America. Otherwise, most countries cherish and look up to America since she has been presented as the nation that protects the weak and misgoverned, although those countries have of recent been ridiculed for hoping in America. If only they had known the truth about the exact goals driving Western foreign policies, these African nations would do things otherwise. No, one cannot exactly claim that Africans hate Americans; it has to do with individual African nations, and America’s policies towards those countries

Economy

38. What does your country of origin produce?

My country of origin is Cameroon. Cameroon produces a lot, especially in terms of agriculture, but her industry is still very light and has a long way to go compared to Western industrial standards. Some of Cameroon's agricultural products, like many other African countries, are coffee, cocoa, tea, bananas, palm oil, groundnuts, cotton, and timber, to name a few. Most of these products are exported overseas where they are transformed into finished market goods to be sold back to Africa and other parts of the world at exorbitant prices. Cameroon also produces oil, with France as the chief beneficiary, whereas Cameroonians themselves go around unable to fuel their vehicles because of the alarming cost of gas in their own country.

39. Are there successful banks in Africa?

Yes, there are successful banks in most of Africa, but most of them belong to foreign investors who come in and make a lot of money by exploiting the people, as the profits these bankers make are not ploughed back into the societies they serve, but to their Western nations. So they are successful in the sense that they are able to plough back a lot of foreign capital into their native economies, without the local economy benefiting that much if at all. The rest of the banks belong to the governments, which are mostly headed by autocrats who care more about themselves and the views of their Western masters than their fellow citizens. Nowadays, in any case, there are private citizens who are trying to start and own their own banks. This has taken so long to materialize because the governments, it is believed, were being influenced to make it tough for the locals to open such institutions so that those banks belonging to former colonial powers could continue to operate without any competition and so make fantastic benefits from these nations.

Another problem with banks in Africa is that the autocratic power of most African leaders makes it possible for them to abuse some of the government owned banks. They, their relatives, and friends,

get money in the form of illegal loans, since bank managers usually are bullied into approving such loans from the banks whenever they want it without having met the conditions laid down by the banks. The result is that such loans are never repaid and so, of course, the banks crash. As a result of such corrupt practices by government administrators and their charges, most Africans have lost faith in banks; they prefer private credit unions which the government cannot influence in any way. Accordingly, in Cameroon for example, there is the Police Credit Union, the Azire Cooperative Credit Union and many others that are effectively managed privately, thereby guaranteeing the security of peoples' money and investments.

Another form of "local banking" in force now in Cameroon is called "njangi" houses. Those with the money create a pool of friends who are willing to go into business. What they do is agree on a fixed amount which every member contributes on a monthly basis, usually, and one of the members gets the sum, which he invests in one way or the other. The same contribution is done every month until all the members take turns in receiving the sum of money contributed. Normally, members cast lots at the very beginning of the session to determine the order in which the sum contributed is to be received. After the order is in place, if a member is desperate, he can "buy" the turn of another member by offering a certain amount until the member whose turn he is trying to "buy" accepts, and he can now receive the total contributed at the stipulated date. On the date each member receives the monthly sum, there is a kind of party, the scale determined by the group, during which the members eat, drink, and discuss strategies in business or otherwise. After credit unions, these "njangi" houses have emerged as the most reliable form of financial transaction in most African countries.

40. What kind of currency do you use in Africa?

Far back before contact with the West, different commodities were used for economic exchange—cowries, salt, and gold are examples. With colonialism, the colonizing nations introduced their local currencies, or at least versions of them, as was the case with Britain in Nigeria, the United States in Liberia, and France in Cameroon. The French had a franc intended for the colonies and its value was ridiculously low compared to the French Franc. It is

still in use today and called the “Franc CFA” (African Financial Community in English). When the franc for the colonies was at its best, or thereabout, a hundred francs for the colonies was worth two French francs. With the theoretical ending to colonialism, some newly independent countries, sooner or later, gave up the currencies of the colonial nations and came up with theirs. In Cameroon, for example, Southern Cameroons was made to drop the British West African (BWA) currency they had been using and in its place was introduced the French franc for African countries instead. This was thanks to Ahidjo’s strategy towards the annexation of Anglophone Cameroon. France, on the other hand, for example, still has her currency in place in Africa. Most African countries belonging to the so-called *Francophonie*, the French version of the British Commonwealth, are still using a near worthless version of the French franc reserved for former colonies in Africa—African Financial Community. However, some African countries also came up with their own currencies. Nigeria is a good example where a local currency called the Naira is in use. So there are different currencies in different parts of Africa, some local and others versions of what is used in the former colonizing country.

41. Is everybody poor in Africa?

One can state almost categorically that there is no community on earth in which everyone is poor, as that would have to be a particularly unfortunate group of people; poverty is a relative concept. In Africa, just like anywhere else, there are the poor and the wealthy, the haves and the have-nots.

The political instability in most African countries fuels the problem, as it becomes really difficult for a system to be established that can help the population and the countries. Foreign investors come in mainly to exploit the people, and even the regimes in place exploit the people for the benefit of the dictator in power along with his Western protectors. Accordingly, it is hard, if not virtually impossible, given the chaos, for there to be that stability required to eradicate poverty by the creation of strong economic organizations that will truly be of help to the masses. The result is that most societies have degenerated into what one might describe as “survival societies,” in which people do almost anything to

survive, or at best the economies have returned to a subsistence level in which the labourer works and depends on daily sales for survival without the privileges of serious investments. Even then, such ventures are heavily taxed by government, thanks to disturbing economic strategies imposed on these governments by international monetary organizations as they struggle to harvest and transfer profits to their local economies in the West. Not everybody is poor in Africa; the societies are structured economically like those elsewhere, with the poor, the middle class, and the rich. In some African societies, however, the middleclass is almost disappearing.

42. Do you pay taxes in Africa?

Like virtually every non-primitive society on earth, most African communities do pay taxes. However, because of the presence of mostly corrupt governments in power, the taxes have been destructive rather than constructive in the sense that they are there as a way of exploiting the poor and giving the money to the rich, who are mostly corrupt government officials and their family members and friends. So although taxes are paid in Africa, the money is not accounted for, as dictators use it in whatever fashion they choose without the citizens being able to protest since an overpaid armed forces and police are in place waiting for an opportunity to attack and kill their own citizens with live-ammunitions; citizens they should be protecting; citizens, taxpayers in other words, who pay their oversized paycheques. This irresponsible police behavior is seen even when the clashes are not directly related to politics, such as with students protesting against the highhanded tactics of some of their administrators. In instances such as these, students are often shot dead by trigger happy policemen who are, more often than necessary, called in to quell a student's riot by force without the issues raised by the students being addressed. The University of Buea, in Cameroon, is the most recent case, where a few years ago, two students were shot dead by policemen simply because they were protesting against the authoritarian techniques of their vice-chancellor, a woman who should know better, given her educational background. The said Vice-Chancellor has just been imposed on another university after things returned to normal. Instead of being made to pay for her highhanded manner which caused the lives of

two young adults in the University of Buea, true to the ridiculous tendencies of the Cameroonian regime, she has just been sent to continue her practices on another University campus, as if being rewarded for her authoritarian practices in Buea: sent there by the government since even positions in academia are government controlled.

Yes, taxes are paid in Africa but not necessarily for exactly the same items, facilities, and commodities taxed in the West.

43. Why are Americans shown only the poor and down side of Africa?

I wish I could be very sure of the answer to this question myself. The point here is that the media focuses only on the bad things that happen in the different countries of Africa—the refugee situation, the spread of AIDS, ethnic clashes and the like, but would never say a word about all the good things that happen on the continent. This would not have mattered much given the trend of the media these days, since the guiding policy is “if it bleeds it leads,” but that which is disturbing about reporting African affairs is the disgusting diction that is usually employed. One can only speculate, and this leads one into suspecting sometimes that this possibly has to do with the media trying to convince Americans, for example, that America is the best country in the world. But then, when it comes to other Western societies they also show only the very best pictures of these societies. One is left with the feeling then, that it is that old Western tradition of presenting the black being as unsuccessful by showing only the worst occurrences and environments that have to do with these events and the people involved. Of course, because there are slumps even in the richest countries on earth, yet only those of Africa are shown people all the time, one cannot help believing in the idea of media bias and the retention of stereotypes. There is poverty, stress, and wealth everywhere on earth, even in the U.S., but it is generally a perfect picture of the country we see all the time in the media. Accordingly, one can only confirm a desire to frustrate and ridicule the black being, plus the fact that sensationalism when it has to do with others, especially Africa, sells.

Education

44. Are there good schools out there (Africa)?

Yes, there are good schools out there, from nursery to university level. In most African countries, Cameroon for example, pupils are expected to spend two years in nursery school; attending nursery school, however, is not obligatory. But then, every child must have a primary school education, which spans seven years. After these seven years the pupil has to write two national examinations (The common Entrance, and the First School Leaving Certificate) in order to get into secondary school, where he or she will spend five years. Another major national examination, The General Certificate of Education (GCE), Ordinary Level, (it used to be international and administered by the University of London) is taken after these five years to determine who goes on to high school. After two years of high school, yet another national exam—The GCE Advanced Level—is taken to determine who goes on into the University. These national examinations are such that the student must pass in order to go on to the next level. Should a student not pass any of these examinations, then such a student has to wait for a whole year at least before attempting the examination again. Failure to pass any of these major examinations means the said student's education virtually grinds to a halt at the point where he or she was unable to emerge with a pass. Consequently, only the toughest and most determined get by. This is the main structure in most African countries, but there are variations in others. Again, students must write three exams in each grade before they can move on to the next; failing more than one of these exams places a student on probation unless the student excels in the third of these three exams, which is taken at the end of the session; only then can such a student be allowed to move on to the next grade. Otherwise, the student spends the next year within the same grade. Even if a student does well in the first two exams and fails in the third, that student risks not being promoted to the next grade. Bookwork in educational institutions in Africa calls for hard work, and there are good schools on the continent in most cases, especially before the university level.

45. Are girls allowed to go to school in Africa?

In the past, different African societies, like those of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon—Mankon, Bali, Nso, for example—were not particularly enthusiastic about girls going to school, as it was considered a waste of family resources, since a girl would grow and go to another family in marriage. As a result, the focus at the time was on bringing up a girl to be a good wife and mother. This has been the case in most traditional societies, but things are changing as cultures come in contact, bringing along different influences. Nowadays, like in every society, women go to school in Africa and work at a job away from home like men do, unless the culture states otherwise, like in some Islamic regions. Of women in Algeria, Mary-Jane Deeb writes: “Women spent their lives under male authority—first that of their fathers, then of their husbands—and were expected to devote themselves entirely to the activities of the home” (100). Even then, within these cultures, things are changing. As Deeb reveals further about the female predicament in Algeria,

After 1962 the status of women began improving, primarily because of the increased education of family members, broader economic and social development, and the willingness or necessity for ever-larger numbers of women to seek gainful employment. In the mid-1950s, about 7,000 women were registered as wage earners; by 1977 a total of 138,234 women, or 6 percent of the active work force, were engaged in full-time employment. Corresponding figures for the mid-1980s were about 250,000, or 7 percent of the labor force. Many women were employed in the state sector as teachers, nurses, physicians, and technicians. (104)

It is, however, hard to make a categorical claim on behalf of the continent as a whole, just as it is with almost everything else, because of the very diverse nature of the peoples and the cultures of Africa. This notwithstanding, girls are now in school, just like boys, and, in fact, it can be argued that they even do better. Consequently, there are comprehensive institutions—until university level—all over the place.

46. Do you have to be rich to go to school in Africa?

Not exactly; one does not necessarily have to be rich to go to school in Africa. In a country like Ghana, for example, there are private schools which are really expensive on the one hand, including those managed by churches—Catholic and Protestants mainly—and state schools (government schools) on the other hand. This is true of Cameroon also, but the state schools which were generally free now charge a nominal fee as the economy of the country continues to plummet under corrupt governments. With the private institutions, one has to be able to afford the high tuition in order to attend them, but with state schools, because they are comparatively free, anyone can attend. At the higher level, it used to be free also, but nowadays there is tuition paid, but it is nothing compared to tuition in most colleges and universities of the West.

Family

47. What is the size of an average African family?

In traditional Africa, the more people one has as friends and family, in a way, determines one's value in society. For that reason, it is often said wealth is not money but the people one has in one's life, since one can talk and interact with people and not with money. Accordingly, the situation was such that in the past, African families went in for as many wives and children as possible, so as to continue with a family's name, and to benefit from the economic advantages such a labour force could provide. With colonialism and capitalism came a new life style, which made life a lot more difficult, as family heads indulged in different methods of fending for their families, some of which left families totally at the mercy of others who became their employers. Since then, families have had to reconsider the number of children they can have, given that bringing up children now is a whole different business, unlike before when the economy was mainly subsistence. Now parents must consider how much money they can come up with in a year to take care of family needs that have also changed greatly. For these reasons, the average size of an African family is becoming more like a European family—it

is anywhere from two to six children or thereabout. The point is that ever since independence, mindful of the effects of colonialism on the people's way of life, which has become more complicated, the smaller nuclear family structure is quickly replacing the traditional extended family, which might also be polygamous. Even though the extended family is still very much in place, and likely never to be wiped out, it is now, unlike in the past, secondary to the smaller nuclear family.

48. What are African families like—the structure I mean?

African families are like families anywhere else in the world, but whereas the tendency in some Western cultures nowadays is to talk about equality in the family and not about the head of the family, Africa's family structure is still very traditional. There is the father and head of the house, the mother who manages the house, and then the children. Every member of the family has some function, at least, that is expected of him or her. Even until today, men are still considered the breadwinners of the family in most African cultures, even if the wife is equally gainfully employed and compensated. The well employed wife may assist in the financial needs of the family, but the husband is considered primarily responsible. The children have other functions that they must execute as their own contribution towards keeping the family running. The children, depending on their ages, do the dishes and take care of lighter chores in and around the home, and fetch water from the distance where this is applicable. Then the parents are expected to take care of the children until they are capable of leaving their parents and starting their own families. Children do not have to rush out of their parents' home in Africa, nor are they forced out by their parents for whatever reason. They can stay there with them for as long as they please, and there is no problem. After all, later on in life, it is the children's responsibilities to take good care of their aging parents, and this is done with a lot of joy and honor. In fact, in traditional Africa, the father always gave a portion of his land to his sons as they matured, for them to start their own families. Such pieces of land were usually close to the father's own personal property, and so the family remained very close.

49. Did industrialization and education have an influence on the people as it happened in post agrarian societies?

It must be remembered that even until today, not much of Africa, comparatively speaking, is industrialized. This is the case because the colonialists designed their African nation-properties (protectorates) to remain agrarian, and at the primary level of the production chain. In this position, these new African nations were to continue providing raw materials for Western industries. Not much has changed since then as many African countries remain heavily dependent on agriculture for foreign exchange—Cameroon, Chad, Ghana, and Senegal, are a few examples. This notwithstanding, the limited industrialization that has occurred and the trend in education have had significant influences on the people's lifestyle. For example, people now spend more years in school trying to earn a college degree instead of establishing their own families at a much earlier age as was the case before. Because of the availability of jobs in some of the industries in some African countries, the governments have to struggle with rural exodus as populations have shifted from the villages into the cities in search of jobs and quicker cash. This has affected the food sufficiency levels of most families who practiced subsistence agriculture, but have abandoned their farms and moved to the cities. Another consequence is the clash of cultural practices now frequently experienced in African societies. Some Africans, for example, still practice their African religion while being Christians or Muslims at the same time. Yes, industrialization, even though not as advanced as it is in the West, and new education trends have had significant effects on the peoples of Africa.

50. Do you marry your relatives? Like cousins?

In pristine Africa, people were very careful about whom they were getting married to, and much of that is still there today. As a result of this, the families of potential spouses are usually well investigated, the one by the other, to ensure primarily that the man is not in any way consanguineously related to the woman, and that terrible taboos had not occurred in either family: suicide, murder, and incest, to name a few. As the inquisition into the backgrounds of the future spouses reveals, it was considered taboo for close

relatives to get married to each other; cousins are in many Africa cultures considered too close for marriage and it does not normally happen.

51. Is there divorce in Africa?

Even though divorce has been in existence forever, comparatively speaking, it is not as rampant in Africa as opposed to other cultures where it is almost becoming an expected phase in marriage. Because marriages are between families and not just the two people getting married, a lot is done to ensure that the marriage will work before any commitments are made on the part of the families involved. Tshilemalema Mukenge is saying the same thing when he observes:

Because marriage is important for society as a whole, mutual agreement between a man and a woman is not enough to make them husband and wife. Their union must be approved by society for it to become legitimate. In Congolese tradition, marriage is an alliance between the groom's family and the bride's family. In the past, the two families intervened quite early in the marriage process. Mental preparation ... was not the only form of parental involvement in the premarital stage. Family reputation and personal character were subject to scrutiny on both sides, especially when the two families lived in different villages and did not have enough prior knowledge of each other. Marriage would not be authorized until certain questions were satisfactorily answered. These included whether members of either family treated their spouses well and showed respect to their in-laws. They also asked about hereditary diseases. Depending on the ethnic group, concern for family reputation was extended to whether women in the bride's clan were known for being faithful to their husbands. Men of the groom's family were scrutinized for instances of spousal abuse. Men and women were also questioned about being quarrelsome, drunkards or thieves. Mutual investigation by the two families continued throughout the betrothal period. (119)

The result of such preparations towards marriage is that the divorce rate is low when compared to other cultures in which a spouse can more easily walk out on his or her family simply because he or she claims the love that used to be in the relationship is no longer there, or because he or she has fallen in love elsewhere, the

children notwithstanding. Strange as it may be, African parents will easily sacrifice their lives by staying in a bad marriage for the sake of their children's welfare. Their hope is to work things out for the good of the children. A troubled marriage without children is more likely to end in divorce nowadays, but even then, not with the alacrity that is almost becoming the norm elsewhere.

52. Do Africans marry people from other races and cultures?

Today, yes, but this has not always been the case. In the past, and even in some cases today, Africans prefer staying close to their cultural roots, as getting married to persons from other races and cultures, it has been observed, often led to unnecessary marital tensions because of cultural differences.

Today, in any case, because of their exposure to, and their better understanding of other cultures, it is a more common trend for young African women and men to get married to whomever they prefer, his or her roots notwithstanding. The result is that there are many international marriages nowadays for Africans who visit or study overseas and return home with spouses from as far off as their quest for knowledge, money, or otherwise, took them.

53. I have heard that Africans marry for children. Does it mean that there is no love in their marriages?

It is still very true that their love for children is the main reason that pushes Africans into marriage. Unlike in some Western cultures where a man and a woman might decide to get married and just live their lives—the two of them—without considering having children, in Africa spouses think their marriage is wholesome only when they receive the blessing of children. Without children, the chance of a marriage surviving is close to zero. The reasons are many. First of all, some in-laws begin blaming the woman without even bothering to consider that the problem could easily be the husband as well; this could lead to tensions which cause the wife to leave. In another case, the husband uses this as a reason to begin cheating on his wife, the excuse being that he needs someone to be his heir. A wife in this predicament may decide to leave her marital home as she is permanently tortured by the feeling that she has not been able to provide her husband with a successor.

Children are highly valued in marriages in Africa; they are the bond that holds the spouses together and supports them through difficult times, especially so because children in some cultures are considered reincarnations of lineage ancestors. David Owusu-Ansah, although writing about the role of women in Ghanaian society makes this point in passing: “Women in premodern Ghanaian society were seen as bearers of children.... Within the traditional sphere, the childbearing ability of women was explained as the means by which lineage ancestors were allowed to be reborn. Barrenness was, therefore, considered the greatest misfortune” (99).

54. Is it true that couples prefer male children to female?

This was more so before than today. In the past, the need to maintain the continuation of a family’s name was very strong and husbands saw in a son the guarantee of that continuity. This was simply because a girl within the traditional set-up got married and took her husband’s name, abandoning her father’s. If such a family had only girls, then the family name died out as soon as all the girls got married. This feeling is no longer very strong because although most young women in Africa would still love to get married and have their own family someday, they are beginning to consider marriage as a matter of choice rather than the necessity and symbol of success that it used to be. Though it is happening extremely slowly, young women are beginning to think life without marriage is not a sentence to a life of doom, as was believed before.

Again, because of the patrilineal nature of most African societies, boys were the choice when it came to successor-ship issues. The irresponsible behavior of certain sons, however, has forced some parents to install girls as their successors, and they have performed very remarkably in this role. The result is that men are beginning to realize that it is not the gender but the person who matters, since brute force is no longer necessary to protect the family. These changing belief patterns have led to many more families not spending sleepless nights worrying about the need of having a male successor born into the family; their daughters can still take over and manage the family.

55. Is it true that marriages in Africa are arranged?

In most cultures of the world, including Western cultures, there were arranged marriages, so one cannot help being surprised that Westerners appear scandalized to hear of arranged marriages in Africa. In the West, marriages were arranged between families in an effort to maintain a family's wealth, especially to get a promising young man or woman into a family, and for other reasons. In Africa marriages were arranged for similar reasons too, especially if the parents of the bride thought that the son-in-law to be was responsible and promised a stable future for his family. It used to be that way in Africa, and the bride had little to say but to abide by her parents' will. This, however, is no longer the case, as girls nowadays come and go with whomever they want. The difference here is that because of strong family structures in Africa, a young man or a young woman will not get into a marriage disapproved of by his or her parents. The most either can do is try to convince the parents why he or she thinks it will be a good marriage. If the parents are still adamant and the young man or woman is too, then like Pilate in the bible, the parents will go along with the marriage. They would, however, make it clear that they had spoken up against the marriage, so should things go wrong, they would be beside their child to support him or her, but they would not share in the blame. So nowadays, African parents can suggest a potential spouse but will not, generally speaking, impose it on their children who, in fact, are the ones who now bring home their future spouses. This notwithstanding, although African boys and girls can bring to their parents' attention whomever they want to get married to, the parents still have a right to object and the children will listen to their advice.

56. Can young adults whose marital choices have been rejected by their parents elope?

This is very rare in Africa, since marriage is between families and not just the young man and woman. Nobody will readily give his or her son or daughter in marriage to a family that is problematic in any way whatsoever, unless there is evidence that the problem can easily be solved, or has nothing to do with the young people themselves. This is the case because in some families there are members who just love concocting baseless problems. For example,

a relation may be making unreasonable demands to the groom's family as a prerequisite to his approving of the marriage; this might lead to an elopement. In the same vein, eloping means that the couple is just postponing their problems since to the two of them they may be married but not in the eyes of the said family member. Accordingly, the young couple will eventually have to return to their families to earn the blessings of their parents and in-laws if the reason for their elopement was authentic other than a parent or an in-law just being ridiculously uncooperative. Because of the problems this could cause in the young couple's lives, it is better for them to do all to persuade and win their parents' approval of the marriage to begin with, instead of doing something foolish like eloping. This notwithstanding, some parents' recalcitrance has forced their children to elope, and they could not care less.

57. Is having a new baby an important event in Africa

Having a new baby is a very big deal in most African cultures. It is the arrival of a new spirit into the family, and as such a very significant gift from the Supreme Being. As a result, a child is received into a family with a lot of pomp. Usually, after a child is born, there are different traditional rites that have to be performed, like the manner in which its umbilical cord is disposed of when it is finally detached from the child; there is also the naming ceremony, on which occasion the child is given his or her name. On a particular day, which is determined differently in different societies in Africa, but usually the eighth day, friends and family members alike assemble at the residence of the family with the newborn baby for the naming ceremony. The ceremony is usually accompanied by feasting, which is only surpassed by the feasting that occurs during a wedding or at the death of an elderly person blessed with many successful children. The family, friends, and relatives, eat, drink, and dance late into the night. The degree of the feasting is also influenced by a number of other factors such as whether or not it is the couple's first child, or their only child, their only son and so on. These different characteristics surrounding the new baby raise the "born-house," as the occasion is generally referred to, to a special degree. As John Reader rightly sums up in passing:

Children were precious, and the drive to reproduce became a central feature of African culture and social order. Woodcarvers celebrated the fecundity of the round-bellied and full-breasted female form; fertile young women were valued members of the community that prospective husbands must pay for; polygynous marriages gathered several childbearing women together in a single economic unit; women prayed for children at priapic shrines in secret groves; society measured a man's standing by the number of children he had produced. (253)

Children are still the most precious "possession" of an African.

58. Is it true African women have their babies at home?

This happened in the traditional setting but with traditional midwives in attendance. It can happen today in the case where a hospital is far away. A woman could also have her baby at home if she misread certain symptoms and found out late that the child was virtually on its way. It is not a rule or the norm, however, that in Africa women must have their babies at home. It happens anywhere. In other parts of the world, away from Africa, women have had their babies at home or even in vehicles. In any case, today, where the woman wants her baby at home in Africa, a trained midwife is always present to assist in the process.

59. I hear people there still marry more than one wife.

Yes, people in Africa still marry more than one wife, but this is a question of choice, and it depends on certain factors too: for example, the concerned person's religion, and his position in society. Whereas Christianity frowns at polygamy, Islam permits it, provided the husband will love and is viable enough to take good care of all his wives equally. Then there are other cases that have to do with the person's status in his society. A traditional leader, for example, is expected to have more than one wife; this is a *sine qua non* for his position. In the case of ordinary members of society, it is a question of whether or not the man has the money to cater for these wives and if the women do not see anything wrong with being co-spouses with other women. There are cases, however, in which the first wife does not approve of the coming of a second wife, and this

may lead to a number of consequences. The husband may decide to impose his will on the household; the first wife may then give in and let the new wife come in, but there will never be peace in that household again, insofar as both wives are together. In a workable and less explosive situation, the husband may decide to keep his wives apart—the wives know they are co-wives, but they never come in contact, except in the presence of the husband. In the extreme, one wife—usually the first who was settled with the man, might decide to leave; the choice is hers, but in that case, the dowry the husband paid for her must be returned, or she remains the man's wife traditionally. If this scenario persists until her death, then her corpse will be taken back to the man's premises for burial, unless he desires otherwise. To prevent this from happening, the wife has to ensure that her family returns the former husband's dowry which he paid in the process of getting married to her; only then is she liberated from her marriage to him. Usually, this is such a cumbersome exercise that the women just move on with their lives, not caring about what will happen upon their death. It must be remembered that this may vary slightly from one African community to another.

60. The words “brother” and “sister” seem to be generic terms used in Africa to address anyone to whom one is related. Is this true?

This is true, and it is because of the extended family structure in Africa, and the very communal nature of traditional African lifestyle, what C. W. Wigwe describes as the principle of collective responsibility in family relationships. As soon as one has the same ancestry with another, then they both belong to the same family and see themselves as members of that large family, and simply address themselves as “brother,” or “sister”. Beyond the extended family, as Wigwe points out, it is normal for example, for “...every elderly male or female” to be addressed as “father” or “mother” (13) In most African languages, accordingly, words for such speed-breaks in the driveway of extended family ties as “cousins” and “nieces,” do not exist. People simply present themselves as related, as members of a family. If there is the need to point out the closeness, or the exact nature of the relationship, then it is described;

for example, this is my sister from the same father, or mother etc. Unfortunately, the extended family, like much else that was traditionally African, is also breaking down today thanks to influence from the West, which has claimed how less burdensome life could be if one were responsible only for oneself, and at best one's micro-family, without the ruckus of dealing with one's extended relatives. This is an unfortunate detour in the family structure of Africa, one must lament, because the extended family meant an ear to listen to one's problems at all times without the need to pay some exorbitant fee, and a shoulder to cry on before all the factors that could lead to an emotional and eventual mental breakdown set in.

61. Is there sexual discrimination in Africa?

Most African cultures will appear to outsiders without similar values as propagating sexual discrimination since men and women do things in separate groups traditionally. This is the nature of such societies and it does not entail discrimination as such. In the same manner, there are spousal roles in African societies that are different from Western societies, for example, and the West always looks at these things as discrimination; similar conditions prevail in the Middle East, and Asia. The fact remains that in Africa's cultures, just as in the Middle East, and in Asia, there are roles played by women, those by children, and those by the men. These roles define and maintain the social structure of the family, and the people as a whole. It is true that in Africa, like everywhere else, some men look "low" on women and this, I believe, is simply because of the physically fragile nature of the female sex and not necessarily because she is some kind of second class citizen. It is not uncommon, therefore, to hear a man, even in the West, say "I cannot let a woman beat me at this game" and so on. This is not because a woman is less a person but because it is obvious, speaking generally, that a man has more brute force than a woman. This notwithstanding, women have proven how equally strong, or stronger even, they can be mentally and emotionally.

With the entrance of some Western habits into Africa, certain traditional tendencies in the way men related to women are changing for the worse, but there are others that are not likely to change; these are core aspects of the people's essence. There is likely never

to be the presence of women in all male secret societies, or the emergence of female traditional leaders in traditionally patriarchal societies; these are two examples that are likely never to be. It must be remembered, though that these changes are not only in connection with the female sex but with society as a whole. The question of sexual discrimination in Africa, therefore, depends on who is looking at what and from what perspective. Oyekan Owomoyela confirms this scene when she observes about women in Zimbabwe:

Without a doubt, women are subject to certain disadvantages in modern Zimbabwe vis-à-vis men, but this does not reflect the way things have always been. Traditional social arrangements took account of women's interests in communal affairs and provided for their full participation on a par with men, although in most cases the genders operated as exclusive groups with discrete functions. The actions of the earliest Europeans to penetrate the continent and impose their will are largely responsible for many of the disadvantages women face today in comparison to men in African societies. For example, the first Europeans, who as a rule were men, brought their chauvinistic Victorian prejudices with them and interacted only with local men, paying scant attention to the presence or interests of women. Moreover, in the process of forcefully appropriating African lands and maneuvering the deprived people into the role of cheap hired labor, the white settlers drastically distorted the time-honored relationship between men and women, and exacerbated the resulting inequities by passing laws and regulations that further disadvantaged women in relation to men. (101)

Fashion

62. I hear African women are fat?

In every society, there are fat and thin people, and Africa certainly does not have the fattest people on earth. However, in pristine African societies, when it came to wives, the culture was such that women who looked plump, but not necessarily fat, were preferred by men as potential spouses. This was so much the case that certain cultures in Africa, like the people of Calabar in Nigeria, did indeed

fatten brides before they were sent off in marriage. Things have changed a little with Africans coming in contact with Western notions of beauty in a woman. This notwithstanding, being skinny with cheek, neck, and hip bones protruding in different places is, even until date, not the concept of beauty in Africa. Most African men like the feel of some flesh.

63. Do you talk about fashion in Africa?

Yes, Africans do talk about fashion and they love dressing well. Because of contact with the rest of the world, one encounters fashion from all over the world in Africa. Fashion from France, Italy (especially their shoes), Britain, Brazil, Jamaica, and the United States (jeans especially) are all over Africa, in addition to traditional African couture.

64. Do Africans wear animal skins?

Not every African has the privilege of being able to put on animal skin as this is usually tied to royalty and other distinguished ranks. So while there are some animal skins used as clothing, these are reserved for special occasions and for very distinguished members of society, or for those playing particular roles. If the idea here is that Africans do not have cloth material or are too poor to buy them, then it is wrong. However, there were times when some Africans put on raffia as clothing. Tshilemalema Mukenge observes of the Congo: “Older persons in Congolese villages speak of times where people used to dress in bark clothes or raffia clothes. Nowadays, the wrap dominates among women and European-style clothes among men...” (107). Mukenge later adds: “The most common women’s dress in ancient times consisted of a raffia or bead skirt (*tshivunga*). The torso was generally uncovered. Gradually, the raffia or bead skirt was replaced by a wrap covering the entire body from the waist down to the ankles. The wrap has remained the distinctive dress of the Congolese woman to date (107).

65. So you people put on shoes in Africa?

Although there are some families that are so poor that members of the family—like children—cannot afford shoes, the norm is that Africans do put on shoes, and these shoes are from the best shoe

supplying countries on earth: Italy, Brazil, and Spain to name a few. The chain of exploitation continues: Africa's raw materials are carted away for virtually nothing and the finished products sold back to them at exorbitant prices.

Geography

66. What's the size of Africa compared to the US?

In terms of population, Africa is much less densely populated when compared to other continents. With one-tenth the land area of Africa, there are more people living in India than on the continent of Africa. In terms of land surface area, Africa is huge. In fact, continental United States as a whole could fit into the space occupied by the Sahara Desert only. John Reader's presentation of the fact is vivid: "... the United States, China, India, and New Zealand could all fit within the African coastline, together with Europe from the Atlantic to Moscow and much of South America" (4). Gann and Duignan put it differently:

"... Africa is of tremendous size. Its area, including Madagascar and other adjacent islands, amount to something like 11,700,000 square miles. The United States fits into this great land mass 3.32 times for the fifty states and 3.9 times for the forty-eight contiguous states. A major European country like Great Britain occupies less than 1 percent of Africa's acreage. The area of Belgium, an important ex-colonial power, would have to be enlarged nearly a thousand times before it equaled Africa's size. Africa's length – from north to south – is approximately 5000 miles; this is only about 200 miles less than the distance from New York to Suez. Africa's extreme breadth exceeds 4600 miles, slightly more than the distance from San Francisco to Yokohama in Japan. Judged by these standards, even American proportions dwindle, and the observer remains overwhelmed by the sheer immensity of the continent. (5)

67. Is Egypt in Africa?

Egypt is an African nation, but because of an overwhelming Islamic presence, like other Islamic African nations, Egypt tends to be more culturally related to the Middle East. It is interesting though, how many phony scholars have tried to prove otherwise about Egypt being African, even though Egypt is fully within the landmass of the African continent and not merely just a protuberance, as Florida is to the landmass of the United States. This is all caused by the skin color of the Egyptian and the bias and discriminatory practices of certain individuals; but when all is said and done, Egypt remains a part of the continent of Africa.

68. Is Africa what I see in “The Gods Must Be Crazy?”

The landscape, yes, is part of Africa’s diverse geographical characteristics; the characters, yes, are amongst the many different peoples that live within the continent of Africa, but not the plot and certainly not some of the roles the characters play in the movie. The plot is that of another Hollywood mind at work, and the individual knows it will sell since it is portraying Africa the way Western minds have always relished picturing Africa and Africans—a land of uncivilized peoples. The Bushmen of Africa may be cut off from “civilization,” but not to the degree that they do not know what a bottle is, as shown in this entertaining but equally ridiculous movie. So, where did that little twin engine plane come from, from which a Coca-Cola bottle falls out into the territory of the Bushman who picks it up? The plane is just flying past on its way from and back to Europe, I guess? “The Gods Must be Crazy” is an extension of the Tarzan portrait of Africa and nothing more.

Habits/Cultural Practices

69. Why are Africans so loud?

This is a particularly strange question, as I thought being loud is individualistic. But, if there is value to this claim, it possibly has to do with the nature of some sounds in African languages which, in themselves, mindful of their quality, pitch, and the strength required in producing them, can be considered loud. This is especially so,

given the tonal nature of these languages. Again, possibly relevant, is the fact that Africa's cultures require Africans to call out to friends and neighbors in salutation, as one walks past their homes. From another perspective, consider the Bakweri people in the South West Province of Cameroon who have a fantastic culture of calling out—by ululating—after carrying out a dangerous task, as a way of alerting those around that all is well in the wake of the task just accomplished. If they fail to ululate, then those around begin moving towards the direction where the task was being carried out, as the implication is that those in harm's way have been hurt in the process, hence their inability to call out. This is especially noticed with the felling of trees.

Again, if Africans do not speak up, then nobody listens to them in a world that, hitherto, is obviously biased against the black being. Beyond cultural practices in any case, Africans and black people as a whole have, therefore, learned to raise their voices so as to be heard.

70. Do you call before you visit say friends or neighbors?

No, this is not African. The African visits whenever he wishes during normal visiting hours—daylight—and he is always welcome. It is the unspoken rule in almost every African home not to let a stranger leave a home without having eaten something. At the least, the stranger should be served drinking water.

71. Are Africans hospitable?

Africans are some of the most hospitable people on the face of the earth. African hospitality can probably only be challenged by Asian hospitality. Africans consider people they do not know as strangers, and they reserve the best they have for strangers. My acquaintances are usually in a state of disbelief when I assure them that I can guarantee them free accommodation in any African country where I have friends. This is possible because of the hospitality of Africans. If you are willing to share in what a family has, you can share with that family for as long as you want, and they would not expect a dime from you as compensation. Some families will even refuse it if offered.

This is hospitality beyond the comprehension of some cultures in which guests must alert their host of their intention to visit. Or consider guests being asked to visit after the family is done eating dinner if they were not purposefully invited to share in the meal, or else, in some cases, they are left sitting elsewhere while the family dines.

72. Are Africans polite?

Africans are polite and friendly to a fault, especially when they are relating to a stranger. They would say “hello” to people they meet on the way whether they know them or not. In fact, not greeting an African upon encountering him or her for the first time at the dawn of a new day is like alerting the concerned that one is not happy with him or her, unlike in some Western societies in which one goes past one’s neighbor looking at him or her in the eyes, yet without exchanging greetings. In the same vein, it is not uncommon for Africans to receive a stranded visitor into their homes and share with them all they have without expecting anything in return. Or take the case of an African going to great lengths just so that an unexpected guest does not leave his or her home without eating. Indeed, Africans are friendly and equally polite.

73. Is there racism in Africa?

By “racism” in this context, I understood the question to be whether or not there are those vices that come along with determining the fact that somebody is treated unfairly simply because he or she belongs to another race. In this light, Africans South of the Sahara, it would seem to me, can hardly be called racist. To these people, when somebody is of a different race, they simply realize that the concerned is a visitor and so give him their best treatment. Although some people have suggested that at the beginning, during the first contacts with the white man, Africans were hostile, yet other evidence points to the contrary. Howard C. French writes, for example:

The first extended contact between Europeans and a major state in sub-Saharan Africa most likely began in 1491, when Portuguese missionaries visited the Central African kingdom of Kongo, a three hundred-square-mile proto-state comprised

of half a dozen provinces. Its capital, Mbanza-Kongo, was situated just on the Angolan side of what is now that country's border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

By all accounts, the people of the kingdom were warmly hospitable to the Portuguese, who were the first Europeans they had ever laid eyes upon. (20)

If Africans were hostile at any time, it should come as no surprise because one can easily posit that this was the case for the fact that they did not know what manner of being they had come in contact with, but as soon as it was established that this was another person, the Africans' hospitality took over.

Severe racism was found in South Africa, however. It was a display which climaxed with the introduction of apartheid. But here it was a minority white population that was bringing misery to a large number of Africans within the latter's native land, which the former had occupied.

On the other hand, it was the colonialists who, upon their arrival in Africa, started showing preference to one group of people at the expense of the other, thereby generating conflict between ethnic groups. This made it easier for the colonialists to control the local populations; the result was tribalism. Tribalism, which became a significant force in society with the arrival of the colonialists, is a poor version of discrimination when pitted against racism. Accordingly, one can, at best, claim in the words of Leon E. Clark, that "The important difference in people for most Africans is cultural, not racial" (2: 129).

74. Do you dance out there at night around bonfires?

In some cultures and some village settings, some people do dance around bonfires, yes. This practice, however, is usually on certain occasions and ceremonies when the villages get together to socialize for one reason or the other. This is not different from Americans who get out at night to blast firecrackers in celebration of a particular anniversary, or simply to sit around bonfires sharing quality time with family members on certain holidays—the 4th of July and Thanksgiving are two examples—while eating marshmallows.

75. Do you people swing from trees?

To the best of my knowledge, not outside the fantastic Tarzan stories about Africa conjured by Edgar Rice Burroughs' fertile imagination. Not even bungee jumping is yet to be popular—that is if it is there at all—on the continent.

76. Do people go around naked in Africa?

This question reminded me of another absurd generalization I stumbled on over the internet when someone claimed that "... children do not wear diapers in Africa...." In any case, I have seen more people naked in Western countries than in Africa. In the West, people go about virtually naked on the beaches and even next to their homes during summer in an effort to get tanned. Some Westerners even belong to clubs that are called nudist clubs, with members who hang about together naked just for the sake of being naked. This is not the case in Africa, where cultural expectations are different and the people do not really need to tan themselves. Again, the culture in Africa expects that a person can only decently expose so much of himself or herself, and decency is tied up to good behavior and family values and reputation. As a result, nobody is willing to ruin his or her family's name by going around half naked for whatever reason, as this will meet with heightened disapproval. In the past, in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon, for example, widows barely covered themselves up during their husband's funeral, but that was a sign of mourning and so was not considered indecent.

If this question had the underlying suggestions that there are no clothes in Africa, then again it is wrong as besides Western cloth material made from wool, cotton, or silk, there are traditional African fabrics still being woven even today after the invasion of the West. Again, the error could arise from the fact that sometimes Africans in pictures sent to the West are usually dressed in what they consider their farm clothes which are usually worn out and torn, approximating rags. The truth is that outside these farming or working conditions, Africans dress elaborately. Robert Brain talking about Bangwa women in Cameroon puts it more bluntly: "The European sees them semi-naked, in rags, farming their fields; on feast days their dress is splendid, and their demeanour gay and independent" (153). Oyekan Owomoyela says of clothing in Zimbabwe: "Traditional clothing is

simple and functional, primarily to protect the body and preserve modesty. Blankets made from bark fiber provide warmth in the cold seasons; otherwise men and women are sparing in covering their bodies” (82 *Culture and Customs of Zimbabwe*).

77. Do you live with animals in your homes?

Some people do, and the pets that enjoy this privilege the most, are cats. Others have dogs, but would not have them in their homes as they are mainly used as watch dogs or hunting dogs. There are others who love to see their dogs indoors too, but they are the minority. In some instances, but this was in the far past, some domesticated animals strayed through homes, but were quickly driven out.

78. Is body piercing a part of African culture?

There are so many other body designs that Africans do indulge in, but when it comes to piercing their bodies, it is not quite a fad any longer the way it is in the West, except with women who pierce their ears and nostrils.

79. What are those marks I see on the faces of some Africans which look like scars from lacerations?

They are facial marks. These facial marks are more common with certain ethnic groups than with others. The Hausas in Cameroon and the Yoruba in Nigeria are two good examples of ethnic groups that made elaborate use of facial marks. Usually inscribed on children between the ages of 3 weeks to 10 years (A. George et al, 25) at the behest of their parents as a continuation of tradition, these marks served different purposes. Sometimes they were decorative in purpose, symbolic of one’s status in society, valued for spiritistic and religious practices, and at other times employed for ethnic identification purposes. Among the Yoruba, according to one report by an *Awake* correspondent in Nigeria,

Each ethnic group has its own unique pattern. For example, vertical marks, one on each cheek, identify Ondo men and women. Three horizontal marks on each cheek identify Oyo people. To those literate in markings, a mere glance at someone’s face is sufficient to read that person’s ethnic group, town, or even family. (“Facial Marks”)

Like most African practices, these facial marks are slowly dying out, but were once, and in some cases are still considered a sign of beauty in women, and of manliness in men. It is no wonder the procedure of etching facial marks is ritualized with a highlight being the performance of songs of praise and the recitation of prayers as the child faces the knife: “Women stand around reciting the “Oriki” (family praise or songs) of the child and praying that he/she may grow old and be able to witness an occasion when tribal marks are inscribed on his/her own offspring” (George et al. 25). A specialist in the community carries out the procedure. With the use of a special knife—special in the sense that the knife is used for this procedure only—a slit is made on the face of a child. The number, depth, or shallowness, and the directions of the slits, have to do with the traditional structure of the child’s lineage and his position in the family. Being a first child, or a prince, are some of the factors that influence the design the child ends up with. Accordingly, facial marks immediately served as identifying features in some of these cultures—a person’s communal background and even his status in society—a prince, for example—could easily be determined from one’s facial marks.

80. Is private fishing a big pastime in Africa as it is here?

Although fishing is done mainly as a way of providing food for the family, as a pastime it is practiced typically by those in coastal areas since they have a lot of affinity to different water bodies. Fishing, however, is not as much of a craze as it is in Western countries where we have huge industries devoted to supplying for and sustaining this pastime and the attendant equipment, to the point that it has become a “sport.”

Health

81. Is there AIDS in Africa?

Yes there is AIDS in Africa, and it is ravishing the populations of most African countries. Peter Schwab’s hyperbole captures the devastating impact of Aids in Africa:

In the final analysis, what best maps out the devastation that AIDS has wrought are the specific numbers of people caught up in the disease. The data are electrifying. There is no way to explain away the starkness of their reality. Indeed, the figures jump right off the page and provide a frightening image. They both shock and numb. In fact, World Bank statistics emphasize HIV-seroprevalence in adults. If children below the age of fifteen are pulled into the findings, the overall numbers are beyond the capacity of a human being to imagine. (111)

There are many reasons for this scenario though, such as the politics surrounding the production and distribution in Africa, of drugs that have been helping Western AIDS patients.

82. Did Aids begin in Africa?

This is a question that has been asked over and over, and the truth, whoever has it, many believe, is still being kept from the world. Before Jared Diamond's very bold and categorical claim in *National Geographic* that AIDS is one of those "nasty" diseases spawned by Africa, it all appeared to have been suggestions, hints, theories, and hypothetical views presented by whomever and quickly forgotten, even though the idea lingered on in people's minds as they went on seeking the truth about this claim. Alex Shoumatoff's search for the origins of AIDs in a continent he damns as characterized by "madness," as per the title of his book and the way he presents the people's lifestyle, where, ironically, he is himself a resident trying to put meaning into the voices he is hearing about AIDS and its origins, yields nothing; the cloud about the origins of AIDS is still overhead. Accordingly, Peter Schwab, for example, like most other scholars, is cautious when face to face with this issue. He writes:

AIDS was initially observed in 1981. In 1983 researchers in Bethesda, Maryland, and Paris, France isolated the HIV/AIDS virus. The same year the first reported cases were observed in Central Africa, although in December 1982 two AIDS cases were diagnosed in South Africa. By 1989 each African country reported at least one AIDS case. Within a decade 25.2 million sub-Saharan Africans, in a region girding 10 percent of the earth's population, were infected with the HIV virus – and the continent became the epicenter of an AIDS pandemic. (108)

Schwab's tact and caution are obvious as he writes: "AIDS was initially observed in 1981," but he does not say where specifically it was observed, then he points out that in 1983, researchers in the West isolated the HIV/AIDS virus, before being categorical about when the first cases were diagnosed in South Africa. The implications are obvious.

Diamond is not that cautious; he is certain AIDS is one other African concoction and he states categorically in his National Geographic article—"The Shape of Africa"—after theorizing as to why Africa, the "runner first off the block," is still tormented by economic problems:

Unfortunately the long human presence in Africa also encouraged something else to thrive – diseases. The continent has a well-deserved reputation for having spawned some of our nastiest ones: malaria, yellow fever, East African sleeping sickness, and AIDS.

It is remarkable that Diamond adds "AIDS" at the end of his list of other typical African ailments even though he is certainly aware of the controversies still surrounding the origin of AIDS. Diamond goes on to explain:

These and many other human illnesses arose when microbes causing disease in animals crossed species lines to evolve into a human disease. For a microbe already adapted to one species to adapt to another can be difficult and require a lot of evolutionary time. Much more time has been available in Africa, cradle of humankind, than in any other part of the planet.

One cannot help wondering about some of these "authoritative" claims. For example, the view that much time has been available in Africa for microbes to adapt from one species to another because of the "long human presence" there, which is accordingly unique to Africa, is certainly interesting. Again, since Africa has such a reputation for spawning diseases, why after so long—centuries—has such an endowed continent decided to emerge only with AIDS, and at this particular time, as a more daunting cousin to Syphilis? Are microbes uniquely African, even with all the other jungles and

rainforests on the face of the earth, one cannot help wondering? One is almost getting the impression here that the jungles of Africa were created before those in other parts of the world, as if nature had to wait to see Africa raise to perfection its own forests before going on to come up with other forests. The truth remains, that Jared Diamond's mutation theory is only what it is, a theory, and many are being bandied around about the origins of AIDS. Diamond's categorical pronouncement in national Geographic is certainly hasty and disturbingly reminiscent of another authority's position on Africa—Hugh Trevor Roper.

A more recent and equally forthright declaration as to the origin of AIDS is by the research teams of Paul Sharp, geneticist at the University of Nottingham, UK; Beatrice Hahn, a microbiologist at the University of Alabama in Birmingham, US; and Martin Peeters in Montpellier, France. In an article with a screaming title, "Aids Traced to Chimp Group in Cameroon," James Owen reports these researchers claim, and more:

Researchers have identified simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) in wild apes for the first time. The virus, which at some point jumped to humans as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), has been found in chimpanzees in Cameroon, west-central Africa.

Scientists have long suspected that HIV had its in (sic) origins in wild chimp populations. But previously SIV had been found only in some captive chimps.

The discovery in wild chimps was made by an international research team, which detected SIV antibodies in chimpanzee feces gathered from forests.

The virus was found in chimpanzees in southeastern Cameroon....

In spite of this bold declaration by these scientists, Edward Hooper, without doubt a leading researcher on AIDS, flawed the claim by highlighting just too many inconsistencies in their approach and method of analysis before concluding that their research seemed "...to have been driven by a determination to prove the bushmeat theory right"

To Africans, the truth, and it is widely believed, is that this is one more of those terrible things facing mankind and it must, as always when it is bad, be blamed on Africa even though Africans do not know what AIDS is nor where it is from. As one African put it, "AIDS is killing us like this because we do not know what it is. We believe if it was an African thing, then Africans would have had a traditional name, and at least we would have been able to address it traditionally, as is the case with other African diseases, even if we were unable to completely cure some of them. True it is new, all the more reason why the first African patient would have been able to say something is wrong with me before going to some hospital to be diagnosed. Africans would have struggled with this illness before anyone else but this is not the case." Africans have many unanswered questions about AIDS beginning in Africa, and so they wonder why it is so hard for the scientist who discovered AIDS in Africa to stand up and declare: "I discovered AIDS in Africa in such and such a clinic, in such and such a country, from such and such a patient and at such and such a date," mindful of how scientists keep records? Note an example of the kind of precision (relating to so called Killer honeybees from Africa) that will certainly allay Africa's skepticism towards these scholarly hypotheses about AIDS beginning from Africa: "The Africanized bees in the Western hemisphere descended from 26 Tanzanian queen bees (*A. m. scutellata*) accidentally released in 1957 in Southern Brazil from hives operated by biologist Warwick E. Kerr, who had interbred European honey bees and bees from southern Africa." ("Africanized Bee").

These Africans views about the origins of AIDS notwithstanding, loaded as they are with emotions, and understandably too, given the West's reputation in dealing with Africa, the truth is that the numerous theories about the origins of AIDS are beginning to sound like oral tales out of the world of Amos Tutuola's *Palm-Wine Drinkard*—a world in which animals and things talk, a world in which fantasy meets and interacts with reality without any awkwardness. Regrettably, it all continues to sound like the dance of African masks in which what meets the eye is not all that is there. Else how could the overwhelming sense of probability in virtually all the articles on the origins of AIDS, characterized by

words and expressions such as “seems,” “likely,” “now widely accepted,” and “probable,” to cite a few examples, suddenly “mutate” into a certainty that AIDS originated from Cameroon, even with the plethora of unanswered questions raised by Edward Hooper still looming in the horizon. Edward Hooper’s confidence is as baffling to those with skeletons in their cupboards as his arguments are potent, and so with a theory backed by facts rather than probable hypotheses, he has emerged with a rather authoritative conclusion about the origins of AIDS:

In 1999 I wrote a book, *The River*, which proposed the hypothesis that AIDS might be iatrogenic (caused by physicians), and that scientists might have unwittingly started the pandemic through an experimental oral polio vaccine (OPV) administered in central Africa in the 1950s. That book touched more buttons than I had anticipated, for it sparked a major cover-up among those who had been involved with making the vaccine, and among powerful interest groups within the medical community.

The attempted whitewash persuaded me to continue my researches. I have now been exclusively researching AIDS for 20 years, and its origins for 16. And whereas I was 95% persuaded of the merits of the vaccine theory when *The River* was published in 1999, I am now (in 2006) 99.9% persuaded that this is how AIDS began.

As for Anderson Cooper and his African expeditions and so-called findings, he and his sponsors can go on wasting money they could have used for more rewarding projects trying to convince themselves and their likes that AIDS started in Africa, in Cameroon specifically. One cannot help wondering if these people are yet to know that the plain truth will always sound true, needing no effort to make people believe it?”

Beyond the origins of AIDs, Diamond’s condescending question as to why Africa which was first off the block is still suffering from economic woes is very disturbing given its source. The fact remains that Diamond assumes Africa’s values were exactly those of the West. He fails to see that it was only after the colonial encounter with its devastating effects on Africa, was the continent’s future completely re-oriented as Africans were forced to abandon virtually

everything African in pursuit of materialistic Western goals which they were never to achieve successfully because colonialism distorted every opportunity for genuine development along Western lines, even after having alienated if not destroyed African values. In the words of Nah Dove,

Prior to the capturing and enslavement of Afrikan women, men, and children, we could feed, clothe, and shelter ourselves; develop philosophies and spiritual, mental, and medicinal health care; construct institutions of every type from the state to the village; create technologies and civilizations; be creative in all the art forms; travel and trade across continents; and be self-determining as a people. It is evident that we are no longer in control of our resources, our energies, and therefore our destiny. As Chancellor Williams (1984) has argued, it is clear that a great tragedy of catastrophic proportions has befallen Afrikan people. (xv)

It is no doubt Ali A. Abdi considers the colonial encounter “the great disaster of colonialism...” (15). Summing up the cataclysmic effects of the invasion of Africa by the West, so as not to write thousands of pages to attempt peeling off the first layer of the curse of Europe’s fundamentally misnamed “la mission civilatrice,” Abdi turns to Van Sertima whom he cites:

No other disaster with the exception of the Flood (if that biblical legend is true) can equal in dimension of destructiveness, the cataclysm that shook Africa.... Vast populations were uprooted and displaced, whole generations disappeared, European diseases descended like the plague decimating both people and livestock, cities and towns were abandoned, family networks disintegrated, kingdoms crumbled, the threads of cultural and historical continuities were so savagely torn asunder that henceforward, one would only have to talk of two Africas: the one before and the one after the holocaust. (qtd. in Abdi 14)

83. Do you have medication in Africa?

There are medications in Africa—those imported from the West and those prepared along traditional lines. Even the West has come to realize that there are medical conditions that are handled better

by traditional healing techniques, which they now call “alternative medicine,” a term they would love to attribute only to Asian methods, but not yet to those African, as theirs are still considered black magic or the works of witch doctors. What double standards!

84. What is malaria?

Malaria is an illness caused by parasites transported by mosquitoes. They inject the parasites into the victim when they bite to feed on his or her blood. In my opinion, having experienced both, the symptoms are very similar to those of the flu. But, whereas malaria has medications that can attack it directly, with the flu one has only to rest and take in fluids, according to medical experts. This is also a requirement for treating malaria and nobody needs to tell the patient this, as his or her body simply becomes weak, causing the victim to want to spend time resting. And, yes, malaria is potentially fatal if left untreated.

85. What illnesses do you have in Africa?

In Africa, there are illnesses typical of the tropics—that is warm environments—such as typhoid, meningitis, malaria, and cholera. These illnesses are found all over in cities and in the countryside where the agents that spread them are present. Mosquitoes for example spread malaria and they can be found in the countryside as well as in the cities where there are standing bodies of water of any kind. It is the same with typhoid, which tends to be in areas where the drinking water might not be the best—this is the case in some cities and suburban areas. A list of tropical diseases can be found on-line. I think the most dreadful to the Westerner is malaria though, because of how it wiped out the earliest European invaders of the continent.

86. Are Africans concerned about their weight like we are here in America?

Because most of Africa has a walking instead of a driving culture, weight is not that much of an issue as the people do exercise intentionally or otherwise by simply going about their routine daily activities. A private car is more expensive to own and maintain, as opposed to taxis that are operated by rich, or more financially viable, proprietors who can easily afford the cars. Like in parts of Europe,

owning a private car in Africa is considered a thing for those who are financially well off. This is the case because it is cheaper to ride a taxi when that occasional need arises. The result of this is that even those with cars prefer driving into the urban areas, parking their car somewhere and then going about on foot. Going about on foot is considered an opportunity to meet with friends and probably earn a bottle of beer or more while chatting over the issues of the day. With these life patterns, exercising becomes a natural phase in the daily schedule of the African, thereby eliminating weight problems. Again, there is the cultural perspective which believes that being slightly overweight is indicative of affluence such that some people do all they can to gain some weight. This is typical of men, though. It is not surprising then that it is a compliment in most of Africa to observe that a person is gaining some weight, an expression that will certainly leave an American in a state of shock.

87. Are illegal drugs common in Africa?

There are some illegal drugs in Africa, but this problem comes nowhere near what the situation is in other parts of the world. The most common drug is marijuana, which some idle young people and those in certain walks of life, like the entertaining industry, love smoking. Cocaine, too, is beginning to gain ground, but it is still strange to most people who prefer getting simply drunk to anything else if they need to feel high.

88. Do you have good drinking water in Africa?

In areas free from drought and hilly in nature, clean water supply is not a problem. Again, the soil, comparatively speaking, is largely free of man-made chemicals, so water from the top of the earth's crust on the hills is completely filtered by the time it is carried down to the lower lying parts of any region where people fetch drinking water. Yes, most African countries, except those that are very flat and those where drought is common, have enough good drinking water. In some rural areas though, the distance to the source might pose a problem. Even then, fetching water from such natural sources which may be located away from the village has become a major pastime event for those responsible for the chore, as it is an entertaining and equally adventurous group activity for those old

enough to make the trip. It is normal then to see younger children, not old enough to make the trip, crying and begging to go along with their older siblings to fetch water.

The situation, however, even in areas where potable water ought not be a problem, has been complicated by utility companies belonging to foreign nations, usually former colonizers, who have meters in place and charge exorbitant rates to Africans, unlike in their native countries because, of course, the bulk of the financial benefits go to their local treasuries overseas. These exorbitant rates cause many people to be unable to afford pipe-born water, and so they have to resort to streams that would otherwise have been a perfect source for potable water, but which have been sullied by supposedly modern practices like the building of dams or the application of chemicals in some nearby fields that end up polluting the streams. So, although drinking water ought not pose the problem it constitutes today in parts of Africa, the fact remains that from time to time one runs into difficulties with drinking water in different areas depending on the surrounding topography, the attendant practices of foreign companies, and corrupt local governments.

89. Are Africans dirty and smelly?

Africans are some of the cleanest people on earth. The warm weather conditions get Africans bathing more often than outsiders will ever know. The average African bathes once every day, whether cold or hot, and will not hesitate bathing a second and third time if he found himself or herself sweating profusely because of a game he or she was involved in, or just from trekking. Parents are particular about their daughter's hygiene, and they encourage them to bathe at least twice a day as opposed to the Mid-Western norm in the U.S, which is once a day. Contrary to pictures of dirty starving children shown on television from war-torn regions of Africa, Africans are very clean people.

90. Who is an African witch-doctor?

For anybody used to the trend, when something is from Africa, especially, even when there is a Western version, it is given a hideous name, and more often than not, demonized. These so-called witchdoctors, generally speaking, are seers with gifts, it is believed,

that enable them to perceive things through their interactions with the spirit world, and then help those in need by one means or another. In the West, they would have been called “psychics” or something along those lines, but since they are from Africa, a name that ties in with the mythical, exotic, and equally barbaric portrait of the continent will work just fine, hence the idea of “witch-doctors,” and can you hear the drums of Africa rolling and pounding in the background just by sounding that word? Westerners must learn the difference between the “evil witchdoctor,” the “good witchdoctor” and the “herbalist” in Africa. Briefly, the first uses his supernatural powers to bring about evil to innocent people, sometimes at the behest of other clients; the second uses his powers to do good, to heal those afflicted by the evil witchdoctor. The herbalist, meanwhile, might not necessarily have any supernatural powers or connections, but has a great knowledge of herbs with which he/she is born or which he/she learns from other experts, and which he/she uses to cure natural ailments with. Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duignan’s effort at presenting the witch doctors as found among the Shona, is enlightening:

The ‘witch doctors’ – of popular European parlance – has gained an undeservedly bad reputation among whites, who often mix him up with a witch or evil magician. In reality the Shona *nganga* was a good man, a helper and healer, who would protect his clients from occult threat and who had a high standard of professional ethics and etiquette. The *nganga* usually determined the cause of an illness that was always supposed to be spiritual in character. He did this through a guiding spirit of his own, the spirit of a dead relative who then got in touch with the patient’s ancestral spirits. There were also doctors who give only medicines, special roots, or herbs. A man of such a kind among the Shona was known as an herbalist (*murapi*); he stood in a distinctly lower category than the *nganga*, for he merely treated the symptoms while leaving the deeper causes of evil to be discovered by the *nganga*.
(96)

91. Have you ridden an elephant?

I have never ridden an elephant because it is not an African way of life except as portrayed in the mythical stories of Tarzan. In real life, riding elephants is a common Indian practice, but not African.

Housing

92. Are there buildings, besides huts, in Africa?”

Yes, there are beautiful buildings all over Africa. In fact it is very possible for somebody to live in Africa just as if he is back in the West, because of the cultural hybrid that Africa has become. Unfortunately, sometimes some of these buildings are not well maintained because of the political and economic instability in most African countries, especially those just coming out of a war situation like Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. So, whereas there are African style homes and huts too, there are also structures that are influenced by Western architectural practices.

93. Do you live in huts in Africa?

Huts are traditional to Africa, just as they are to other cultures, and are still very much in existence, and just as not all Westerners live in apartments, so too, not all Africans live in huts. Huts are our traditional homes, in the sense that they were some of the first habitable structures built by man when man first thought of accommodation beyond caves. These huts, however, have changed with time in different places to accommodate man's changing needs and the natural characteristics typical of man's environment. Depending on where one is, so too does the quality of the average African home change. There are some communities that are still using the traditional huts which are single room huts with sections in the interior reserved for different activities—storage, sleeping, and receiving guests. Then there are other societies with the average home typical of those found in middle class societies and above in other parts of the world, and then there are the very rich with private mansions of their own also.

Huts, in any case, are not an African affair only; they are found in different cultures around the world—India, Tibet for example—especially amongst constantly migrating peoples who build temporary huts which they use until they are ready to move again. Interestingly, even in some of the “huts” in Africa, one is likely to come across luxury items like phones, TVs, and even computers as part of routine daily life; but, of course, more so in the middle class homes and those of the rich.

In Africa, if I must reiterate this, there are villages, towns, and cities, and contrary to other peoples’ cherished convictions about Africans, these peoples live in houses or huts that best suit their geographical conditions and their life-style. Nomadic groups for example, just like with some Mongolians, Saami people who occupy the northern parts of the Scandinavian countries, or tribes of the deserts with their caravans, build temporary huts which they destroy from season to season as they move from place to place with their cattle or reindeer in search of green grass. In some cases, the huts are permanent but they suit the lifestyle of the people. It is these huts that Western visitors, scholars, and the media alike, love to show of Africa all the time, while ignoring other fantastic African and Western-style structures that are on the continent, even though most are now poorly kept because of on-going political rivalries that have brought about collapsing economies.

94. Do you live with monkeys?

If by this is meant in the same jungles, then the answer is no. We probably share some boundaries here, even though the monkeys do raid human territories from time to time as they forage for food; the reverse is also true, for man has destroyed a lot of the natural habitats of these animals through farming, logging, and the building of residential areas. Some people, meanwhile, may own a pet monkey or two.

95. Are there skyscrapers in Africa?

There are some really high buildings in Africa, even though they cannot compete with some of those skyscrapers in places like New York; these however, are not traditional African buildings. These are extensions of Western influence on the continent.

Judiciary

96. Is there crime in Africa?

Like in every human society, there is crime in Africa, and it has only just gotten worse as certain scenarios shift from the typical traditional to the more urban and Western in style. This is not to say there was no crime in Africa at all before the white man; the changing face of Africa, ever since the arrival of foreigners, is bringing along many strange things, and so equally strange behavioral patterns are no exceptions. There is the need to point out that whereas hideous crimes coming out of Africa of recent—the Congo and Rwanda for example—have been beamed to the world, it is also necessary to let the world know that these are countries with on-going or just concluded wars. In every human society, horrible things happen when there is the breakdown in law and order. I am yet to learn of a war where atrocities have not been committed, even wars involving parties that are signatories to the Geneva Convention and which claim to be more civilized. Where there are human beings, there is crime; it varies only in intensity depending on the cultures of the people concerned.

97. What, if there are any, are the courts in Africa like?

To begin with, there are courts in Africa: customary courts and courts adopting the legal systems of the West. In most African societies, the courts were the very last resort, as there were highly respected elders who were always called in to settle disputes at any level before it ever got to the palace of the traditional leader, where the latter officiated. With the coming of the colonialists, they brought along their own legal systems that conflicted with those of the local people whose freedom and independence they snatched. The result was such that customary courts were to help with judiciary activities after the traditions of the natives, whereas the colonialists' own Western styled courts took care of their affairs. There was a clash of roles here as the colonialists manipulated the situation such that the customary law they allowed to continue had to be compatible with colonial ideas of justice. Then there were Muslim courts, which were guided by Islamic laws otherwise called *sharia*.

So one sees different judiciary systems in Africa depending on where one is—traditional, Western, and those that are based on religious practices.

Landscape

98. Is Africa very hot?

Africa can get hot in certain areas, but it is not always as “steamy” and “sweltering” as some would want people to think. I cannot understand why reporters and writers from Western countries where temperatures sometimes soar to as high as 120° F speak and write about Africa as if it is a permanently steaming cauldron. True, Africa is next to the equator but these exaggerations are just absurd. In Texas, for example, it sometimes gets so hot that people die from the heat, but you do not hear of “America’s boiling heat,” or “America’s choking heat,” or better still “America’s killer heat” in the media; the diction used to describe the situation is usually different and not damning and condemnatory as would be when the setting is Africa.

The problem with heat in Africa is that certain areas get to about 80°F and stay that way for months with minimal, and sometimes no rainfall. Droughts and deaths result from this because of the famine and starvation that follow such extended dry periods, and not because Africa is incredibly hot. But some writers and reporters alike would like the world to think that Africa is a raging inferno in which only the black man can survive; a possible hint at the reason why Africans are “burnt black,” I dare suggest. Just like other parts of the world, Africa has places with warmer climates and others that are cooler; I dare not say colder so as not to mislead some people who know what it means to get cold, as the temperature does not get anywhere near the twenties except on mountain caps.

I have often heard people who have been to Africa compare Florida’s weather to that of Africa. Bottom line, Africa is not as hot as some people want us to believe. The weather is beautiful all year round, even when it rains. There are numerous Africans who are born and they die without experiencing a tornado, or a real American

style storm, and of course freezing winter conditions. People do die in parts of the world from time to time either because of extreme cold or from heat waves, which is no more the case in Africa. No, Africa is not a sweltering oven wherever you turn. Writers who claim this must be reminded that besides Africa's wealth, it is the beautiful tropical weather conditions of most of the continent that got the earliest white people bent on not leaving Africa, malaria carrying mosquitoes notwithstanding. What would temperatures around the seventies and the eighties sound like to a Canadian or Minnesotan after one of those true native winters? Beautiful, I guess. Yet hardly anybody talks about "stifling" heat or "frosty" Western cold with that disgust which is often present when Western writers talk or write of Africa's heat. Robert W. July's summation of the weather conditions in Africa seems to me reasonably representative: "The geographic location of Africa has contributed to its tropical climate which is warm but extreme only in certain locations and which lacks the violent fluctuations in temperature found, for example, in North America" (3).

99. Does it rain all the time in Africa?

It does not rain all the time in Africa. There are parts of the continent that do experience heavy rainfall like Debuncha, a small town in the coastal region of Cameroon, West Africa, which receives an average of 400 inches of rainfall a year. There are other parts that experience a lot of dryness, like the northern parts of most African countries, because of their desert and sandy nature. Northern Cameroon, or Nigeria, for example, is drier than the rest of the country.

Africa is blessed with two main seasons: the dry, and the rainy season. During the dry season, there is almost no rain in most parts of the continent, which is why droughts do occur from time to time in some areas, but then in the rainy season it rains almost daily, although with long enough pauses to permit people to go about their businesses, on foot even. It is, in any case, usually muddy during the rainy season on the one hand, and dusty during the dry season on the other. In most parts of Africa, the weather conditions are not extreme, contrary to popular Western opinion. Only when there are droughts can one make such claims, and droughts are not that widespread.

100. Does it snow in Africa?

Freezing temperatures that bring about snow are, generally speaking, alien to the continent of Africa, except at the very top of mountainous peaks like the Kilimanjaro and other very high regions in the northern parts of the continent where winter temperatures flit around just somewhere above freezing. In low-lying regions, the closest to snow is probably a heavy downpour of hailstones in cold places, even then, because of the warm conditions, such rare compact carpets of hailstones do not last long on the surface of the earth before they thaw.

101. What is the landscape of Africa like, is it all jungles?

This is another Western myth; Africa is not all jungles. There are flat, deep, and hilly patches on this continent: the savannahs or grassy plateaus, mountains and imposing hilly territories, the sandy or desert regions of the continent, and the lush jungles of Africa. Africa's landscape is richly diverse, but because of how the continent has been repeatedly—almost compulsively—described by Western writers who have come to have a parochial and rather pathetic picture of Africa, the continent is always presented as composing of nothing else but jungles. George S. Fichter describes the varied African territory beginning from the western coast thus:

The western coast of the immense continent of Africa bulges far into the Atlantic Ocean, its underside close to the equator. Most of this hump's southern shores are low with lagoons and mangrove swamps that give way to steamy jungles. Farther inland, the land rises to grassy plateaus and, in a few places, mountainous highlands. The land then slopes downwards again first into bush and grassy country, the savannahs, and finally into the broad sandy bowl of the great Sahara Desert. (1)

In the same vein, William Mark Habeeb has pointed out, "Africa is one of the most geographically diverse of all the continents. It contains everything from snowcapped mountain peaks to grassy plains (known as *savannahs*), dense rain forests, vast deserts, and long, stretching rivers" (12 writer's emphasis). Despite this variety emphasized by so many writers, the jungles of Africa which do not constitute that much of the landmass seem to be Africa's most appealing feature to Western senses. Along the lines of the peoples of Africa and their culture, Habeeb's words are equally revealing:

The common perception is that Africa is socially and culturally homogenous. Nothing could be further from the truth. Africa is an incredibly diverse continent: over 3,000 distinct ethnic groups, each with its own culture and traditions, call Africa home, and more than 800 languages are spoken there. Africans worship in churches, mosques, Hindu temples, and synagogues – and many still practice their ethnic group's traditional religion. While a majority of Africans are black, a significant number of them trace their roots to India, Europe, and the Arab world. (51)

One can only think then, that the love to denigrate Africa has a certain bizarre soothing effect on some people. How else can one explain this seemingly overpowering love to present Africa in a most negative light by the West especially—Africa's jungles as opposed to Western cities, Africa's huts as opposed to Western skyscrapers, Africa's third world standards as opposed to Western civilized standards. The Prime Minister of Britain, Tony Blair, decrying the bombings in London, spoke about people coming there in search of better living conditions; he must have forgotten that these foreigners only discovered Britain thanks to Britain's invasion of the former's nations through adventurers; an invasion which climaxed into the colonial era. In the words of Chinua Achebe (*Arrow* 148), Britain brought home ant-infested faggots so why are they surprised when lizards begin visiting them? Had British adventurers in search of wealth and territorial expansion not invaded and colonized different countries of the world, they would not have seen these different peoples visiting and laying claim to England today, not in these large numbers. No, Africa is not all jungles.

102. What are the different tribes in Africa?

There is the need to point out here that before the coming of the colonialists, Africans did not look at themselves in terms of tribes. This was a term sparingly used and in relation to biblical groups mostly. The colonialists, for racial reasons, started using the term more frequently, and to it they attached condescending stereotypical images relating to the black person. Beyond just the racial values to the white colonialists, as Bill Berkeley has argued,

...the gathering of Africans into identifiable 'tribes' was also a convenient administrative tool. Particularly under British administration, in countries like Uganda, Kenya and South

Africa, administrative subdivisions were built upon this image of 'tribal' blocks. Tribalism solved the colonial dilemma of how to dominate and exploit vast numbers of indigenous inhabitants with a limited number of colonial agents, by mobilizing groups on the basis of linguistic and cultural similarities that formerly had been irrelevant. (12)

The term 'tribe' as such, that is relating to ethnic groups in Africa, is more a creation of the colonialists than a concept that had been existing before colonialism. Assuming, therefore, that this question is based on the colonial designation of tribe and its attendant meaning—a group of people bunched together by colonialists simply because it was believed they spoke the same language or were culturally similar—then one can say there are hundreds of "tribes," thousands even, in Africa.

103. Do you have lawns in Africa?

This is one of those questions about which every detail still stands out clearly on my mind. I had just bought a lawn mower from one of those super stores in Minnesota, and then I asked if it could be partially dismantled and packaged so that it could withstand the long trip home. This elderly lady, who was a sales associate, confirmed she could get someone to help me, but she remembered to ask where home was since she was sure the mower was in shape for any trip within continental USA. When I told her Cameroon, she asked me, "And where is that?"

"West Africa," I replied, already too familiar with the fact that not many people had heard of Cameroon.

"Oh! You people do have lawns out there?" She asked, looking genuinely surprised.

I smiled calmly and replied, "Yes Ma'am, we do have lawns out there."

"I see," she answered, completely at a loss as to how that could be true, given what she sees on television about Africa as a jungle "peopled" by animals and wretches who could hardly afford any luxury.

Yes, Africa does have lawns, and they are so beautiful and healthy; they do not need to fertilize them at all for them to flourish.

104. Is Africa dark as a continent?

This is a term of reference that one hears from time to time without knowing exactly what those using it mean, besides the fact that it makes Africa come across in that fantastic barbaric light that Africa seems to thrive in best within Western illusions. However, besides a fraction of the native inhabitants who are dark skinned (there are others of lighter complexion), the continent is itself like any other part of God's earth with day and night alternating. The idea of a "dark continent" that probably gave birth to this question is possibly more a reference to the complexion of some Africans themselves than to the suggestion that the continent does not receive the bright light of God's dawn. Beverly G. Hawk's interpretation is even more original for he points out that the expression is an allusion "not only to the skin color of its inhabitants, but to their ignorance of European ways" (4). Why Africans were supposed or expected to bother themselves about knowing European ways while living in Africa remains puzzling. No, Africa is not dark; it is some of her sons and daughters whose skin color is dark.

105. Are African bees "killer bees?"

Most insects and animals, no matter where they come from, might camouflage, and, in the extreme, kill or bring about death, one way or the other when they have to defend their territory; this is the case with the bee in Africa, which has a sting, just like other bees, that some people react to fatally. Known scientifically as *Apis mellifera Scutellata*, so-called killer bees were "first domesticated in the scrub desert of central South Africa. Although their hives are small, they are said to be more productive than the Italian, German, and other strains of European honeybees to which they are related. Proponents of *Apis mellifera Scutellata* say the African bees set to work an hour earlier than their cousins, are more disease-resistant, and yield more and, by many accounts, better honey" (McNamee). With such qualities for bees, it is no doubt the Brazilian government, in 1956, charged Professor Warwick Kerr, an English native turned Brazilian citizen to research into these bees. By importing these African Bees, Brazilian production of honey increased tremendously, raising Brazil from the 47th honey producing nation in the world to the seventh; a remarkable feat by any standard. But typical of

dictatorships, when Professor Kerr fell foul with the Brazilian military regime at the time by publicly criticizing their neglects and excesses, he was not only jailed, his remarkable work and credentials were tarnished as he was presented as some weird scientist bent on destroying his adopted country. As usual, gaudy newspaper stories in the wake of these events gave the people to believe, and not without the support of the military dictatorship, that Kerr had been training his bees to kill by attacking human beings when commanded, hence the emergence of the myth of killer bees. One site has summed up the trend appropriately: "...Ker's work at improving the honey bee by importing Africanized stock was at first ridiculed and criticized within his country, and that tone was irresponsibly picked up by the North American journalists and bureaucrats. Journalists, because the thought of 'killer Bees' invading America sold papers; Bureaucrats because the thought of 'killer Bees' invading America meant research and regulation dollars" (Dr. Kerr). But the truth as Gregory McNamee has pointed out is that:

African bees are no more venomous than their European cousins. Neither do they go out of their way to look for targets, human or otherwise. The difference lies in the African bees' defensiveness; resistant to most pests, they have natural enemies only in predators, and, survival of the fittest being what it is, the African bees have long since evolved to resist predation with extreme prejudice. When their colonies are attacked or approached, they tend to swarm and sting with abandon. Since their arrival in the Americas, the African purebreds have intermingled with European varieties of honeybee, giving birth to a hybrid, the "Africanized bee." It is these small, graceful creatures that have been crossing our border into the American Southwest of late, and giving so many people fits.

Back in Africa, these bees are simply called bees just like bears everywhere are simply called bears, even with their killer instincts. It is in the West, especially in America, that the destructive modifier "killer" has been added, and this addition is certainly in keeping with the strange and exotic, if not barbaric portrait of Africa which has already been burnt on the average Western mind. Calling these

bees “killer bees” conjures the picture of monstrous insects that leave their hives bent on finding some innocent victim whose pilgrimage on earth they are determined to terminate, and woe betide us, here they are in America at last, after wiping out the entire continent of Africa, one would suppose; a good plot for Hollywood it would seem to me. How interesting would it be for some poisonous spider from America to be called “killer spiders from America?” But America is not in the tropics, and only things from the tropics are dangerous or, better still, fit into this mystifying mold of savagery.

No, these bees are out there gathering nectar which they store in their hives as food. It is only when the notorious human invader strays around their hives, or comes in more directly in search of sweet honey (to sell and make money), that he is attacked and in some cases some people with allergic reactions die. Sometimes, humans mistakenly stray into these bees’ territory and are attacked; after all, the bees cannot tell the difference between an invader and a stray human being. This, however, is no reason to brand bees from Africa “killer” bees. Name any creature that will not fight back in self-defense, even if it means killing or dying in the process. The fact that African bees are fiercer in defending their territory does not make them “killer Bees.” Interestingly, the idea of these bees being called “killer bees” is as strange as it sounds since people also die from allergic reactions to bee venom from European honeybees. As Leon Marshall reports in his article “Killer Bee’ Touted as Economic Lifesaver in S. Africa,” Elize Lundall-Magnuson, an entomologist who manages the Beekeeping for Poverty Relief program in South Africa also does not see African bees as “killer bees” she points out that this fierce reputation comes from comparisons with its more docile European counterpart. Gregory McNamee is more poignant in his rebuttal:

To call them ‘killer bees’ is clearly wrong; the once more common German bee is more aggressive. And because Western culture tends to equate anything African with savagery, ‘Africanized bees’ isn’t much help. In Latin America the creatures are called *abejas bravas*, ‘brave bees,’ a name unlikely to catch on with any but the savviest gringos.

106. Is it true that everyone in Africa co-exists with all the animals, like lions walking down Main Street?

As shocking as this question might be to an African, the truth is that so many people think this way, and worse even, about the continent. Rev. Charles R. Stith's remarks in *Ebony* are indicative of this fact:

When I was U.S. ambassador to Tanzania, some of my friends were surprised there weren't lions and elephants walking right up to the front door of the embassy residence. Instead, they saw paved streets, modern restaurants to go out to for dinner, modern hotels of the sort you'll find in any western city in the world—like the Kilimanjaro Hotel in Dar es Salaam, where they have flat-screen TV access to the Internet....you've got some of the greatest tourist attractions of the world beyond wildlife. (125)

This kind of thinking is unbelievable yet true; how unfortunate that a culture could leave its citizens to be this misinformed about a people. No, lions are untamed animals that exist out in the wild and do not come close to human beings except when their hunt for food leads them to surrounding villages where they raid farmer's cattle and usually get killed in the process. Otherwise, an African whose village, not to say town or city, is far away from those areas that are suitable habitats for big game, like lions, might live and die without ever seeing a lion, let alone strolling down Main Street with a lion walking in the other direction.

107. Have you ever seen an elephant alive?

In the wild, no, but at a zoo, yes I have. It must be remembered that contrary to what the media shows of Africa, all Africans do not live next door to wild game. A question such as this amounts to saying for example, that every American has seen a bear, or a bison, or a buffalo live since they inhabit the United States, and this is not the case. In Africa too, unless people happen to be on a hunting expedition, or find themselves around these animals' natural habitats, only then do they manage to see these animals alive, just as tourists do.

Languages

108. What language do you speak in Africa?

I was asked this question after I was urged to say something in “African,” and all I could do was smile as I tried explaining that there was no language called “African,” just as there is no language called Canadian or American. Africa has over 1000 languages that are local to the continent, before those of the former colonialists that are also in use. As a result, most Africans who grew up on the continent speak at least two languages, many speak more than that. Some African languages that are well known out of the continent are Kiswahili, Hausa, Yoruba, and Lingala. Within some African countries, there are hundreds of languages and dialects. In the same vein, Paul Bohannon and Philip Curtin observe: “There are many languages in Africa; 800 is the traditional number. Joseph Greenberg, in the latest edition of his classic monograph *Languages of Africa*, found adequate records to consider and classify 730, but says the number may be well over the traditional 800” (68). Toyin Falola’s perspective is equally revealing:

Africans speak a variety of languages, over a thousand, mainly indigenous to them. These languages are very much connected to their cultures and identities. A language group could constitute a nation – not a tribe, which is sometimes used in a derogatory way to mean inferior language and people. Speakers of a language can run into millions, but there are also languages spoken by smaller numbers. The majority of the languages are old, evidence that many groups and cultures have inhabited the continent for centuries.

Contacts with outsiders have led to the use of additional languages, such as Arabic, and European languages, notably English, French, and Portuguese, in areas formerly colonized by European powers. In the past, a number of languages were understood over wide areas, notably Arabic, Hausa, Fulfulde, and Swahili. (*Key Events* 6-7)

Accordingly, it is difficult to say this is the language spoken in Africa, as it all depends on the individual concerned, and where he or she is from. Even then, those who have traveled much within Africa may also have learned different languages from far-off parts of the continent.

109. Do you speak English in Africa?

English is one of the many foreign languages spoken in parts of Africa as a result of the colonial encounter. When the English came to Africa, they brought their language too as a way of intensifying their grip on the continent. This was done by all the colonizing countries; the result is that today many different foreign languages such as French, Portuguese, and Italian, are also spoken on the continent. Countries such as Nigeria, Gambia, Zambia, Liberia, Tanzania, Cameroon, and Kenya use English; Cameroon, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Gabon use French; Angola, Portuguese; whereas Italian is dying out in Somalia, where only a few older people in the South can still remember the language.

110. Why do Africans find it hard pronouncing some English words?

The reasons why some Africans find it hard to pronounce certain English words are similar to the reasons why some Westerners stutter uncontrollably and end up saying something else when they attempt pronouncing words from any African language. Too begin with, when this problem is faced by new speakers of the English language, then it is just a question of their articulators not being used to some of the sounds of this new language. It is just like learning to play a musical instrument for the first time; one's fingers struggle to get used to the chord positions at the beginning, but then everything becomes smooth and without any difficulties with time. Even then, these languages—African languages and English—are phonemically and phonetically different, hence the characteristic awkwardness that accompanies early efforts at speaking the one or the other, whether they are African or English. Again, because of the tonal nature of many African languages as opposed to the stress pattern in the English language, for example, most Africans tend to position their stress wrongly just as Westerners attempt stressing words in African languages, instead of simply changing their tone to effect a change in meaning. The problem besetting the African in the face of some Western languages, like English, is further exacerbated by the fact that Africans are multi-linguists, and so there is some interference from the different languages they speak. The interference, however, depends on where the African speaking is

from, as different native African languages affect the speaking of English differently, mindful of the sounds they have in their own languages which may not exist in English, and those that they may not have which are found in English. The untrained Mankon man from the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon may find it hard pronouncing the [p] sound since it does not exist in his language. The result is that whenever the untrained Mankon person tries pronouncing English words with the [p] sound, it is the [b] sound that is heard. And so for example, instead of saying “Paul” the untrained Mankon speaker of English will say “Baul.”

111. What are those weird clacking sounds you people produce when speaking your language?

They are linguistic sounds used for communicating meaning, depending on the situation, just like the sounds of the English language. The only difference here is that these sounds are peculiar to parts of Africa—East and South Africa especially, and they are not weird. They are merely strange because they do not exist in Western, and even some African languages.

Nutrition/Eating Habits

112. What kind of food do you eat in Africa?

The foods of Africa are as varied as the ethnic groups and so one might talk of a favorite food to a particular ethnic group and of nothing as a favorite African dish. There is no such thing. Every ethnic group has its own favorite dish. Remarkable about some of these dishes is the amount of time that can be spent preparing them. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of these dishes are used by wives as the symbol of a truce when trying to make up after a “fight” with their spouses, as the men are aware of how much time and effort has gone into preparing the meal. The “egusi pudding” is one such meal in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon. Men, on the other hand, buy expensive jewelry and/or clothing when they are making up after a fight in which they stand to blame.

113. Do you use recipes for cooking?

Some do, but without the strict measurements characteristic of recent Western recipes. Typical African cooking, however, comes from the soul as our mothers, whose noble duty it is to cook for their families, measure with their eyes and feel with their hands while occasionally tasting for the desired flavor as they cook.

114. Do Africans eat bugs?

Yes, most Africans eat one kind of bug or another—certain larvae found in some trees, termites, and green grasshoppers, are good examples. Some of these are in fact considered expensive delicacies mindful of the fact that they are seasonal only. The labor that goes into catching some of these bugs makes them highly treasured delicacies. The green grasshoppers, for example, which are characteristic of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon during the early dry season, fall from the sky like heavenly manna during the night, so families can set up extra bright light bulbs to attract them on their downward flight. All kinds of receptacles are put around the bright light bulbs into which the grasshoppers are channeled and collected. But there are people also running around in the nearby fields grabbing what they can by hand and shoving them into other lighter and easily portable receptacles—buckets, pots, cans, and baskets to name a few examples. Some of these bugs, like the tree larvae or crickets are barbecued and others, like the green grasshoppers and termites, are stir-fried in their own body fat.

115. Do all Africans drink blood from cattle when herding?

This is not a common practice. It is a practice that belongs to ethnic groups that thrive on herding, generally speaking. The Maasai of Kenya are a good example. As if in confirmation of this example, Kuki Gallmann writes of the Maasai in her book, *African Nights*, "... this tribe which feed purely on the blood, urine and curdled milk of their cattle" (7).

116. Why do Africans play with their food before eating?

Africans do not play with their food before eating; this has to do with the way certain dishes in Africa, like in parts of Asia, are eaten using fingers instead of silverware. Some African dishes are such that they are swallowed without necessarily being chewed. Take

fufu, for example, which can be made from corn or pounded coco-yams. When ready, *fufu* ends up looking like mashed potatoes, but it is moulded into baseball sizes or thereabouts—oblong or round—before being served to those eating. The individual now takes a ball of *fufu*, depending on how much he or she would like to eat, from the main dish on the table and puts it in his or her plate or bowl. The choice is the diner's. There is also another bowl with soup that is used for eating the *fufu*.

To eat *fufu*, the diner pinches a sizeable lump off the main ball-like portion (depending on how it was fashioned—baseball sizes, or the same quantity but egg-shaped) and proceeds to fashion it between his or her fingers into a small bolus which is then dipped into the soup before it is put into the mouth and swallowed without mastication necessarily taking place in most cases. It is the process of forming the bolus between the fingers that the Westerner sees as playing with food. It is the same thing to think that somebody eating fries in a McDonalds is playing with his food simply because he uses his fingers to pick up a few fries which are then dipped into ketchup followed by the brief journey to the mouth. An African molding his *fufu* into little round sizes in readiness for swallowing is not playing with his food; he is making the swallowing process easier just like chewing does to the fries.

117. What kind of drinks do you have in Africa?

We have all kinds of drinks you can think of; they may not be the same *per se*, but they can largely be categorized into similar groups: sweet drinks, beer, liquor, traditional liquor, and other natural drinks like palm-wine.

I wish most African countries were as prolific in other areas as they are in the beer industry. In most African countries, new alcoholic drinks appear in the market almost on a yearly basis, and the alcoholic content would make them pass for liquor in other societies, instead of the beer names they are paraded in. So, there are local beer names and the drinks come in large bottles, and there are imported drinks. It must be remembered that Africa serves as a market for finished products from Europe; one such finished products is alcoholic drinks. Besides beer, there are different liquors from all over the world—Europe, Asia, and the Caribbean.

Then there are different local brews depending on what part of Africa you are looking at. Some of these are man-made, brewed from corn for example, but there are other drinks that are natural, like the palm-wine which is found in most West and Central African countries—Nigeria, Liberia, and Cameroon for example. These are natural in the sense that they are tapped from palm trees. The sap that would normally have formed coconuts on the trees is caused to ooze out from the tree at strategic points around where the branches meet with the tree trunk, and it is collected in gourds and sometimes bottles. Cameroon also has another version called raffia-palm. At their freshest, they taste almost like nectar or honey—very sweet—but as they get older, even by the hour, and fermentation sets in, their taste begins changing with the formation of alcohol. Whereas some people, especially women, love palm-wine fresh and sweet, some men think palm-wine is best when it is about one day old and beyond; it is a question of choice, depending on whether one is into drinking or not.

118. Do you eat cooked food in Africa?

Yes, like virtually every culture on earth, we eat cooked food in Africa if it tastes better when cooked, although sometimes, depending on the situation, people try little quantities of some food raw. Most people in African communities would, for example, prefer sweet potatoes cooked; however, it is not uncommon to see children in the farms trying them raw. This notwithstanding, African dishes are usually cooked, some taking many hours to get ready. Herein lies the richness of African cuisine as in addition to foreign, especially Western menus, there are rich African dishes that are a staple to the people.

119. Do you have soda in Africa?

Yes there is soda in Africa, some that are local, and others that are international like Coca Cola, Pepsi, and Fanta, to name a few. But these do not constitute a major part of the daily menu as is the case in other parts of the world. People drink them just once in a while when they are hot or thirsty and not as a do or die part of their meals or snacks.

120. Do all Africans eat monkeys?

Not all Africans eat monkeys. To some Africans, like the Bonobos who occupy part of the Congo River Basin, it is a delicacy while to others the taste has to be acquired. I have had American students squirm at the thought of having goat meat, whereas others who have tried it have considered it extremely tasteful. Or take the case of the student with a pet rabbit almost vomiting because another said he loves rabbit meat. So too, not all Africans eat monkeys.

Occupation

121. Are all men in Africa goatherds?

No, not all men in Africa are goatherds. My father was not a goatherd, nor was my grandfather. If there was ever an era when this was the main male profession in Africa, that must be really far back in time, so much so that it is, to say the least, absurd to think today that all men in Africa are goatherds. It is tantamount to saying that all Americans are cowboys. It must be pointed out though, that there are ethnic groups that thrive mainly on goat herding and/or cattle rearing such as the Maasai of Kenya, or the Fulani of Nigeria. Of the strategic nature of herding in parts of Somalia, for example, Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi writes:

In Somali-inhabited areas of the Horn, there are neither verdant tropical areas nor mines of gold; so Somalis adopted livestock raising, an economic activity best suited to their dry land. It is therefore livestock, such as sheep, goats, and camels raised by pastoralist families, concentrated mostly in the northern and central regions, which continues to be the principal economic activity, providing jobs and livelihoods to at least 60 percent of the population.... Even today, if there are no official statistics, it can be assumed the situation has not changed. (155)

Even with this picture, which is true of other countries in Africa, it cannot be said that all men in Africa are goatherds, for there are communities that are mainly agrarian and know next to nothing about herding.

122. What kinds of jobs are there in Africa?

The same jobs existing in other parts of the world are found in Africa—white and blue collar jobs. It is only a question of varying factors within the nations concerned. For example, given their historically aggressive foreign policies, some non-African nations have the need for a large standing army, which is not necessarily the case in some African countries. In this case, the number of men and women employed as soldiers will be higher in these countries compared to most African countries. Or consider the excellent standards of living in some Western countries which make it possible for them to hire many more workers in different areas—medicine, for example, with better patient-doctor ratios when compared to some African countries where one may have hundreds of patients to one doctor. Again, there are countries that rely heavily on fast foods; these employ more persons in this industry, which is not yet the case in Africa where people are more comfortable eating with family and friends at home. So it is a question of preferences, needs, and the resources available. This notwithstanding, the job market is basically the same all round the world, with minor differences triggered by cultural values and the resources available.

123. Since the standard of education is very low in Africa, do you need degrees to get a job?

It is always trumpeted that Africans are uneducated, yet I do not believe this to be the case, more so especially after my travels. There is the need to differentiate here between illiteracy and education. That a reasonable proportion of the African population might be illiterate is true, yet it is my conviction that it is not different in other parts of the world. The case of Africa's is easily noticeable because Africans mostly speak a different local language before speaking one or more European languages. As a result those who cannot communicate in a European language are quickly branded uneducated which is not the case. It is more shocking, after all these centuries, to find many families in the West still bragging today about first generation college members of their families just getting into college, the vast majority being high-school graduates or drop outs. If this is pitted against the African scenario, mindful of when Western educational systems became entrenched in Africa, then

not only are Africans very educated people, they are also very literate. And yes, academic qualifications determine who gets hired depending on the job.

124. Do you have 401k in Africa?

By 401K, I assumed the focus was on retirement plans. There are retirement plans in African countries, but they are not as reliable as those in Western nations, because of Africa's turbulent socio-economic landscape. As leaders come and go, there are those who do not understand the economics behind such projects and so end up misappropriating the funds until the whole scheme collapses. Cameroon is a good example here. The citizens' pension scheme has been robbed of its financial backing by pilfering leaders until it has collapsed. Hard working citizens who contributed for their retirement now find themselves stranded, with a government that cannot account for the money they contributed while serving the country in different capacities. There are retirement plans in Africa, but how reliable they are is a whole different question, and that varies from one country to another.

125. Is it true the unemployment situation in Africa is bad?

Today it is, mindful of the effects of the structural adjustment program, and other such programs, imposed on African countries by world bodies, financial and otherwise, that claimed to be interested in helping get African countries out of their economic woes. Their policies and terms were such that shrunk virtually every existing economic structure in these nations, resulting in so much hardship, with numerous qualified citizens on the streets without jobs. As a result, those who can, have left their countries, and are trotting the world as economic refugees, while some who cannot and others without the necessary qualifications to facilitate emigration have resorted to corruption and banditry in the extreme.

Politics/Government

126. Who is your president in Africa?

One cannot talk of the president of Africa. Africa is a continent made up of fifty-four sovereign states, each with its own president. This analogy might be more illuminating if one were to think of the different states in the United States as sovereign nations, each with its own president; that might give a somewhat clear picture of the situation in Africa. The United States has one president because the different states are united and there is a federal government overseeing all the states which are administered by governors. Some past and present African heads of states and scholars have nurtured dreams of a united Africa, but this is a far away dream as such a situation would be a threat to the stability of the West, and the control they have of the capitalist world. This is the case because were Africa to be united, it would mean so much power in the hands of one person or government who or which would be able to control, easily, the supply of Africa's natural resources and raw materials to the rest of the industrialized world. This will certainly tilt the balance of power, thereby transforming Africa into a major actor along the corridors of power wielding blocks. This is why African nations were left in the state of chaos they were abandoned in, in the name of independence. Yes, Africans did ask for, in fact sometimes had to fight for independence, but were the intentions of former colonialists nations otherwise, Africa would have been left in a better state than she was in when she was virtually dumped by exploiting colonizing nations that were frequently disgruntled at being forced to give up their sources of great wealth.

127. Are there governments in Africa?

Yes, there are governments in Africa, but, like with everything African today, since the colonial encounter, one talks about the traditional and the Western perspectives. The way African communities were structured was influenced by the people's worldview, but with colonialism almost every African community was forced to abandon most of its traditional perspective from which it looked at the world, and to use that of the colonialists instead.

This occurred in government or politics too. Even today, it is not news to hear Western leaders forcing different parts of the world to turn to, practice, and adhere to multi-party democracy, as if it is some infallible political system from God almighty Himself. By doing this, Westerners are being too simplistic. Different peoples have different cultures and so should be allowed—in fact it is their right—to come up with systems of governance that take into consideration the belief patterns and life style of the citizens in the countries concerned. This is what ought to be if the welfare of these nations is truly an issue to the so-called super-powers. The West—Europe and North America—cannot impose its values on other cultures. Things that work in the West are working because it took the West time to plot its way through different socio-cultural upheavals before getting to where they are now. Other cultures have the right to adjust to the state of affairs they find themselves in, navigated thus by the tide of events characterizing their existence on this earth, just as it happened with the West. Nobody can come into the United States today, for example, and tell Americans, even though it had been practiced before, that men should be allowed to marry as many wives as they choose to, simply because this may be a successful practice somewhere else on earth. Can one imagine the chaos this will cause when simply trying to introduce uniforms in some schools or the idea of having children pass exams as *a sine qua non* for promotion to the next class has met with fierce resistance in some communities, yet Westerners think it is okay for them to go around imposing their ways on other peoples while expecting these peoples to be grateful for this. Or are we saying might is right?

In most traditional African societies, governance was already far advanced before the coming of the white man, and it took into consideration the people's way of life. In some of these societies, much similar to Western kingdoms, there were traditional leaders who went by different titles depending on the people—fon, mfon, oba, and chief, to cite a few examples.

Depending on how these rulers governed, some could have been described as despotic, and others benevolent. Then after this leader, in terms of hierarchy, there was the house of elders, much like a senate elsewhere. Most of these governments resemble European style governments, but with subtle differences brought about by

the culture of the people. This is what these people know and what has worked for them, but they are now being forced not just to learn, but to immediately begin practicing, a form of government that has little or nothing to do with their traditional values. How many countries can go to Britain and say they should stop having kings and queens in the 21st century, as those are obsolete and wasteful, and expect to be listened to? If this is indeed some practice that will die, it will die with time and not because some foreign super-power thinks it is wasteful and obsolete. The tradition of kings and queens is British, just like in other countries, and it serves their ego at least. Better still, try telling Britain to stop driving on the left hand side of the road and join the rest of the world on the right, and see how they would react. But listen to their politicians, like all those who consider themselves super-powers imposing things on other countries, especially countries in Africa.

Yes, there are governments in Africa, but many are faltering because they are practicing one system of government or the other, imposed on them by former colonialist nations, that means next to nothing to the people.

128. Are there kingdoms in Africa?

There used to be great kingdoms, states, and empires in Africa such as Old Oyo, the Akan states of Ashanti and Fante, and the Kingdom of Dahomey, but these were destroyed or weakened by invading Westerners, while Britain, like Spain and other European nations, are still enjoying their royal tradition. There are structures similar to kingdoms that still exist in Africa, but these have been rendered almost sterile by the Western system of government that has been made paramount to them, while a few hand-picked miscreants passing for heads of states, continue destroying the classical socio-cultural practices of African peoples by rendering themselves open to the influences of Western governments.

129. Are there chiefs in Africa like we have in Native American communities?

Yes, there are chiefs in Africa. These are traditional leaders who are at the head of their traditional communities. These chiefs were, and some are still, very powerful as leaders of their societies. The

colonialists tried destroying some of these traditional administrative set ups, but others proved too strongly established to be tampered with and so the colonialists thought it wise to work hand in hand with these leaders, rather than alienate them.

In some parts of Africa though, like in Nigeria, this is sometimes just a title of honor, and so it must not be confused with those areas where chiefs are leaders of huge communities.

130. Are there wars in Africa?

Yes, there are civil wars going on from time to time in parts of Africa. Some of the earliest of these wars had to do with freeing certain African states from the grip of their so-called colonial masters, as was the case in Algeria and Angola, and others from their fellow countrymen, as was the case in Liberia. In the latter case, these countrymen who took over from the colonialists have only made things worse in their countries, and as a result, it is not surprising to see people struggling to free themselves from oppressive African regimes.

131. What's all the talk about Nelson Mandela? Who is he?

Nelson Mandela is a lawyer by training, and an African “rebel” who led his people’s (the black majority) struggle against the exploitative, discriminatory, and abusive white minority, through the political party known as the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. His dream was to win his people’s rights and freedom from a most oppressive white regime made up of people who had come into his country and taken over everything of theirs while discriminating against them. For this reason, this innocent man fighting only to be accepted as a human being by immigrant white exploiters and oppressors in his own country, found himself sentenced to jail by a kangaroo court. Mandela was to spend over a quarter of a century in jail, refusing to get out when offered his freedom on the condition that he abandoned his struggle on behalf of the people of South Africa. Before long, thanks to their efforts, daring African patriots and even some Westerners—musicians, writers, and politicians alike—made the world aware of the plight of this great soul.

Meanwhile, different Western regimes dragged their feet about pressuring South Africa to abandon apartheid: some talked about being diplomatic when the South African Gestapo was butchering thousands of black patriots and prophets alike. But the strength of truth will always prevail, and so the lawyer and freedom fighter unjustly turned prisoner in 1964 by the apartheid regime, was released on February 11, 1990. And as if to repay him for his honest efforts, this great soul soon rose from prisoner to elected president. Mandela's popularity soared greatly when, instead of seeking revenge against the white minority population, he pleaded with his fellow countrymen, even at the risk of being branded a traitor, that nothing like apartheid should ever deface South African soil again.

All the talk about Mandela, therefore, is because the world became aware of the injustices of influential political leaders in not forcing South Africa to unconditionally free a man they had imprisoned simply because he was leading his peoples' struggle to free them from the yoke of white injustices and brutality in their own native country. The whites had come to their land as guests and were welcomed, only for them to discover the wealth, the favorable weather conditions, and the beauty of the land and then decide to stay while attempting to seize everything from the natives. Accordingly, with the collapse of apartheid, some of the blacks did thirst for revenge, but Mandela, one of the greatest victims of all, refused endorsing revenge, which would have led to the possible massacre of all the whites in South Africa given the level of barbarity they had displayed to their African hosts when the minority white population was in control of power.

Mandela is therefore the symbolic victim of white oppression and its ultimate defeat in South Africa.

132. What was "apartheid"?

In a nutshell, apartheid was a system of government which came into force after the Union of South Africa was created in 1910, a union which gave political control to the whites, thereby leading to black resistance. The white regime instead intensified its tactics against the black protesters. With the Afrikaner National Party's victory in the 1948 election, the party went on to completely marginalize the black population by denying them political and

economic power. The regime's brutal enforcement of such inhumane practices that amounted to segregation resulted in the system of apartheid, "an Afrikaans word that means 'apartness' or 'separateness'" (Hamilton, *South Africa* 29). It was the intention of the white minority to keep the races apart from each other—to separate them so to say—with the white minority having all the best resources and the Africans having nothing and living in despicable conditions.

133. Are African leader's dictators?

Indeed, a vast majority of African leaders are dictators. In some countries, they are soldiers, and so they can easily use the military to terrorize the people in an effort to maintain themselves in power while draining their nation's resources—financial and otherwise. In other countries where the leaders are civilians, they "bribe" the military into supporting and maintaining them in power by giving them higher pay than the rest of the nation, and interestingly, more than they deserve, of course. As a result, it is not uncommon in some African countries to meet a soldier with a high-school diploma earning more than a medical doctor. The leaders who permit such scenarios care less about their citizens. All they want to do is steal from the country's coffers and stash this money in Western banks. Because of the political stability of such Western nations, the security of their stolen wealth can be guaranteed. In the mean time, they cling to power with the help of an unworthy military that has been corrupted, and by Western nations that look the other way while such ills are perpetrated. These Western nations have a lot to benefit from such puppet regimes—from the nation's resources, to tactical advantages such as military bases—even as the victim nations are portrayed to the rest of the world as poor beggarly nations. Adam Higginbotham gives a typical example of my point when he writes about Liberia and the United States:

The people of Liberia have always believed that they enjoy a unique and close connection with the people of the United States; Liberia was founded by U.S. citizens, its constitution was drafted at Harvard, and its flag is even copied from the Stars and Stripes.

But the relationship has been characterized by U.S. exploitation and neglect since 1821, when the swampy island that would become the nation's capital, Monrovia, was purchased only after an officer of the U.S. Navy held a pistol to the head of a local chief. After the barely literate Master-Sergeant Samuel Doe seized power in 1980—by disemboweling then-president William Tolbert in his bed at the executive mansion in Monrovia—the U.S. government was happy to overlook the staggering corruption and human-rights abuses of this regime in exchange for the benefits of a CIA station cite, a convenient African base for U.S. aircraft, and a friendly vote at the UN. (136)

Yes, most of Africa's leaders are dictators, and some are bloody in their deeds. Ironically, their godfathers, who, more often than not, are also heading Western regimes, maintain some of these morons in power in exchange for different benefits. It must be remembered that this is being done at the expense of the citizens who are wallowing in misery of one sort or another.

134. Why are there so many refugees in Africa?

There are many refugees in Africa because of the different wars and attempts at ethnic cleansing going on in different parts of Africa, say, in The Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan at the moment. Sometimes the refugee problem might be due to natural disasters like drought or famine.

Religion

135. Have Africans the concept of God?

In every African language, there is a word for the Supreme Being, which word in English is "God." According to Toyin Falola on the religiosity of the Yoruba, one of the best known indigenous religions on the African continent, "Yoruba religion explains that the world was created by Olodumare, the Supreme God, who used Oduduwa as an agent. In this creation myth, Oduduwa founded the world and the Yoruba people" (*Culture and Customs* 34). Of the Igbos,

Falola observes that they "...believe in Chukwu, the Supreme God, who has various messengers such as the sun, sky, and earth" (*Culture and Customs* 36). In this way, one can easily tell that the concept of God is not foreign to Africa. In fact, the African is so religious that almost everything he does in his daily routine, typically, is prayer in praise of the Supreme Being. A. T. Grove registers the same point in other words: "Religion forms an integral, everyday part of the life of the individual person and the community, but is particular to the clan or larger social group" (44). In the same manner, Africans have a very strong bond with their ancestors, like almost no other group of people, as they invoke their ancestors in whatever they do, whether it is as simple as the sharing of kolanut and palm wine between friends, or as tragic as the burial of a person. Igor Kopytoff reaffirms this when he writes: "The ancestors are seen as retaining their role in the affairs of their kin-group. They are propitiated with 'sacrifices'. They are seen as dispensing both favours and misfortune; they are often accused of being capricious and of failing in their responsibilities, but, at the same time, their actions are related to possible lapses on the part of the living and are seen as legitimately punitive" (414). The situation sharing kolanuts is effectively displayed by Ezeulu in Achebe's *Arrow of God*:

Ezeulu took the bowl from Nwafo and set it down between his legs. Then he picked up the kolanut in his right hand and offered a prayer. He jerked the hand forward as he said each sentence, his palm open upwards and the thumb holding down the kolanut on the four fingers.

'Ogbuefi Akuebue, may you live, and all your people. I too will live with all my people. But life alone is not enough. May we have the things with which to live it well. For there is a kind of slow and weary life which is worse than death.'

'You speak the truth.'

'May good confront the man on top and the man below. But let him who is jealous of another's position choke with his envy'

'So be it.'

May good come to the land of Igbo and to the country of the riverain folk'

Then he broke the kolanut between his palms and threw all the lobes into a bowl on the flow. (107-108)

Victor C. Ferkiss after emphatically observing that “Africans are everywhere religious” (35), goes on to add:

The religious life of traditional Africa is intertwined with village life generally because just as in ancient Greece, particular deities are the patrons, often the supposed ancestors, of particular tribes. Rules of personal conduct and social custom not only have the sanction of religion but are of its essence. The African village, like the early Greek communities, is a religious community. (36)

This notwithstanding, religious practices vary in one detail or the other from one African society to the other. As A.T. Grove rightly points out, “Details of religious observance vary from one tribe to another. In most of them some form of ancestor worship is practiced and the existence of a supreme being is recognized together with a number of other spirits believed to have some control over material phenomena” (44). In essence, religion is the thread that tightly strings together the beads of philosophy, social theory, politics, theology, medicine, psychology, law and order, birth and death, into one whole—the African *weltanschauung*.

Yes, Africans do not only have a concept of God, but are a very religious people. This ideal situation is, no doubt, contaminated today by the different religions that have found their way into the continent, bringing with them, in certain parts of Africa, unfortunate sporadic religious tensions.

136. I hear Africans believe in many gods?

This depends on the ethnic group one is talking about. There are African groups that are monotheistic and others with traditional pantheons at the head of which is the supreme deity. Of the Chokwe people, whose land stretches from the northeastern section of Angola into Zambia and Zaire, Joyce Moss and George Wilson paint a similar eschatological portrait:

The Chokwe believe in an all-powerful being who created the earth. However, according to their belief, this god has no concern for what people do on earth. Instead, nature spirits and spirits of Chokwe ancestors, which derive their power from the supreme being, watch over earthly affairs. A central sacred ground in Chokwe villages is reserved for ancestor worship and reverence to these nature spirits. Individuals are responsible for honoring their maternal ancestors. (108)

Monotheism is typical among Africans in Cameroon and Kenya, for example. The Kumbo, Mankon, and Bali peoples of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon, for example, are monotheistic. To the Kumbo people, God is *Nyuybom*; to the Mankon people, God is *Ŋgui*; to the Bali People, He is *Nyikob*. Neal Sobania confirms this condition in Kenya:

For many of the peoples who live around or near Mount Kenya, this snow-capped peak is understood to be the home of *Enkai* or *Ngai*, a similar variation of this name. Among many of the people who live in the north and who speak Cushistic languages, God is called *Waq* or *Waqqa*. (35)

One will be correct to assert then, that some Africans have and do believe in many minor gods over whom there is the supreme deity. This complex belief system, much akin to that of Native Americans, is effectively conveyed by Ferkiss:

Africans do believe in the universality of spirit and that the order of causality in the universe is such that the acts of spirits affect daily life and can be influenced through religious practices (or manipulated through witchcraft). They recognize, however, a hierarchy of spiritual beings, and all traditional African religious systems conceive of the spirits as holding their power as surrogates to a Supreme Power.... (35-36)

137. What religions exist in Africa?

Almost any kind of religion can be found in Africa; it is a question of how popular it is. There are traditional African religious practices, there is Christianity, Islam, and a host of other Eastern religions sprinkled around the place.

138. Do the different religions in Africa co-exist peacefully?

A question such as this warrants a recall of the fact that some of the different religions in Africa today are foreign to the continent; religions such as Islam, and Christianity, amongst others are examples. Generally speaking, therefore, one can observe that the different religions in Africa do co-exist amicably but from time to time, Moslems and Christians do clash in parts of Africa, like in Northern Nigeria, a notorious offender in this light, and these clashes usually result in the death of many people.

139. How many times a day do Africans pray?

The African's life is totally interwoven with his traditional religious practices, and this makes it hard to determine how many times a day an African has to pray, since everything is tied to prayers as he invokes his ancestors in whatever he does. In the words of Kofi Awoonor, "To speak of the nature of religion in any traditional African society is to attempt to isolate what is the very essence of the society. For the whole society is based on the proper direction of the religious and spiritual obligations of man toward the hierarchical structure in which he takes his own place in all the three stages of his life (51). Steven J. Salm and Toyin Falola are saying the same thing when they state that "Religion is inseparable from virtually every aspect of Ghanaian life and is important in the determination of worldview. Religion commands a central place in the organization of social, political, and cultural life, and regulates the relationship between people and their physical and spiritual environment (33). Religion became formalized and institutionalized with the coming of alien religious practices, with prayer hours being counted and special places being reserved for prayers. The result is that with Africans who are Moslems, for example, they have to pray five times a day as per the tenets of Islam. Christians now pray as often as they wish to, but they must go to church at least once a week on Sunday. There are those who go to church on a daily basis.

140. When Africans move to the West, what religion or churches are they likely to become a part of?

Generally speaking, unless they decide to change their faith, like some people choose to do from time to time, Africans who move to the West maintain their faith and the attendant churches they had been a part of when back on the continent. For example, Catholics remain Catholics, and Protestants, Protestants.

141. Do Africans believe in life after death?

Africans believe very strongly in life after death. They believe, traditionally, that when one dies one joins one's ancestors in the spirit world. It is for this reason that the "cry-die" ceremony, the funeral in the West being a rough equivalent, is very elaborate. In some dirges performed during such ceremonies, the deceased is

presented as a messenger who is given messages to take to the ancestors already in the spiritual realm. Accordingly, to the traditional African, he is always surrounded by the spirits of his or her deceased relatives, and so before he or she does anything, he or she calls upon them for support and protection by pouring libation in their honor. Depending on the level of the ceremony, it can be done by an individual in his or her home, or by a traditional priest or priestess if it involves the entire family, or the community as a whole, hence the interaction with the spirit world.

142. What are rites of passage in Africa?

To begin, it would seem to me that rites of passage occur in virtually every society in one form or the other, but the difference lies in how they are treated, or celebrated as is the case in Africa. In the West, parents are excited about a child's first words, and the first day at school; be it at the kindergarten or college level, it is a big deal and the family as a whole looks up to it. Leon E. Clark extends the analogy further:

In the West, the ceremonies of confirmation in Christianity and Bar or Bas Mitzvah in Judaism marks this passage. In a purely circular sense, acquiring a driver's license in the United States at the age of 16 is a rite of passage, bringing new-found independence but carrying added responsibilities. (2: 71)

In the case of Africa, there are also a number of different rites of passage. In traditional African set-ups, age groups, for example, existed to execute different functions within their different communities. Because of the presence of these age-groups, there were different rites to introduce boys and girls into different age-groups. These rites helped them acquire not only their cultures from their mentors, but also a sense of growing up, and of maturing. John C. McCall describes a phase of one such rite before elaborating on its significance:

In the heat of a December afternoon, the streets of a West African village resound with the call of drums. A towering figure covered with raffia palm leaves and topped with a finely carved wooden head is moving through the village. This is an embodied spirit. It is surrounded by young men dressed in short loin-cloths, their bodies whitened with chalk. These men wield long switches which keep the gathering crowd at a

distance. The spirit sways with the music, and the men sing as they dash to and fro. After a while, the spirit troupe disappears into the men's meeting house. Then a group of nearly one hundred women singing in unison begin to march ceremoniously down the street. Each hand waves a white handkerchief in perfect synchrony with the music. All through the day, performances such as these will continue: masquerades, singing, dancing, and every sort of festivity.

This is an *otumo* ceremony performed in a village in Ohafia, Nigeria, as it has been for centuries. It is a rite of passage celebrating the fact that a particular age set has officially gained recognition in the community as full adults. The men and women in the community all belong to age sets made up of those people who are close to them in age. Age-set membership is for life. As people get older, their age set passes through various age grades. The younger grades share various minor civic responsibilities such as keeping paths cleared and cleaning the markets. People look forward to the day that their age set will earn the recognition of *otumo* and pass into the adult grade. (175)

I regret to say this, yet it is true, that some of these rites are also slowly dying out in some African communities because of the alienating effects of Western cultural presence and its attendant influence on the way of life in African societies. Rites of passage therefore, can be seen as those elaborate traditional ceremonies celebrated at the village level, that mark the graduation of members of the community from one status in life, like an age- group, into another.

143. Does voodoo exist in Africa?

It has been said that voodoo as it is known today is a product of the fusions of religious belief patterns by slaves who came from different parts of Africa into the Americas. Pooled together by the slave trade, and faced with the terrible consequences of slavery, these Africans had to prop each other up as a means towards survival. The result was that they turned to their different religious beliefs for consolation and hope; Voodoo was the outcome. Accordingly, it is said of voodoo today, that:

Although its essential wisdom originated in different parts of Africa long before the Europeans started the slave trade, the structure of Voodoo, as we know it today, was born in Haiti during the European colonization of Hispaniola. Ironically, it was the enforced immigration of enslaved African (sic) from different ethnic groups that provided the circumstances for the development of Voodoo. (“Origins of Voodoo”)

Voodoo in this light is a derivative of some of the world’s oldest forms of worship that have been in existence within the continent of Africa since the beginning of human civilization, thus qualifying “Voodoo as probably the best example of African syncretism in the Americas” (“Origins of Voodoo”).

144. Africa is famous for her masks. Is this a religious thing, or what are these masks about?

It is true that Africa is famous for her masks, the use of which is as old as the people’s worldview itself. These masks, made from various materials—metal, leather, fabric, and mostly wood—can be worn in different ways. In some cultures masks worn vertically to cover the face are popular, but there are some which cover the entire head of the performer, and yet others that rest on the head only.

Masks are a part of the people’s worldview in that they are used as a form of communication during special traditional events. Depending on the event, planting season rites, crop harvesting rites, rites of passage, initiation, and the preparation for war against human or spiritual enemies, these masks are used to depict the spirits of ancestors, the forces of good and evil, the dead, deities of the land, and other forces believed to be in control of the world.

The world of masks performing is complex because of the reasons that warrant a performance, the levels of meanings in a performance, and the nature of the performances involved. Also significant is the fact that the masks mostly have unique dance steps and behavioral patterns, depending on the societies to which they belong, some of which societies are secret. Accordingly, some masks belonging to secret societies can only come out to perform at night, and some have members of their audiences streamlined to members of the secret society only, while others are not to be watched by women, and in other cases pregnant women. Ironically, some of

these secret society masks, which are believed to possess supernatural powers, as obvious from the speed with which they move and the feats they perform, can only be subdued when they go out of hand by a pregnant woman. Masks such as these are believed to be possessed by powerful spirits, as the performer is usually in a trance during which state only an initiate can understand whatever the mask is saying. Different masks also deliver their messages differently: some grunt, others produce sounds like whistled fricatives, and yet others only gesture to members of the society to which they belong. Through their performance, the masks succeed in charging the atmosphere with a specific mood relevant to the occasion—joy, grief, disgust, and fright are a few examples.

In fact, some masks are considered superior to others even within the same ethnic group. For example, in the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon, a mask from the traditional leader's palace is considered superior to any other mask from within that traditional leader's territory. Accordingly, when a mask is emerging from the palace to perform, only another mask from the palace can come out to display at the same time. Otherwise, the ordinary mask must withdraw and make way for the mask coming out of the palace to perform first.

It must be understood that these rituals and occasions during which masks perform, are sacred and for the welfare of the community. In this light, generally speaking, a mask functions as a medium linking the realm of the natural and that of the supernatural, hence the religious nature of most performances and of the masks as symbols of different spirits.

Sexuality

145. Is homosexuality practiced in Africa?

In spite of current foreign influences, Africa remains a continent tied to tradition, and by this I mean things handed down to them from the days of their forefathers, so they tend to frown at things that conflict with their culture.

Traditionally, certain practices are considered taboo in most of Africa and homosexuality is one of them. Little wonder then, an earlier Chairman of the Anglican Provinces of Africa, Peter Akinola,

described homosexuality as “an abomination which contradicted the Bible and African values” (“Obasanjo Backs Bishops”). The point therefore, is that even if some people had such instincts, they are bound to go unnoticed or unrealized, as those concerned would not be audacious enough to emerge with such practices in the open. Doing this would stigmatize the family of the “culprit,” which would be tragic, since Africa is a continent of families not individuals, hence the communal life-style of the people. Accordingly, a person’s behavior brings a lot to bear on his or her family at the very least. If homosexuals exist in Africa, then they have to belong to a very secret cult as such a practice is anathema to the traditional mindset of the people. This position notwithstanding, Murray and Roscoe point out in their book—*Boy-Wives and Female Husbands*—that Evans-Pritchard, while “describing traditional Zande culture as remembered by his informants,” wrote that “Homosexuality is indigenous. Zande do not regard it as at all improper, indeed as very sensible for a man to sleep with boys when women are not available or are taboo....In the past this was a regular practice at court” (26).

146. Do you have same-sex marriages in Africa?

Same sex marriage is a controversial topic in many societies around the world because of the disagreement it is stirring, and Africa is no different. Most African nations speak against same sex marriages vehemently. This main trend notwithstanding, same sex marriages have been reported in parts of Africa. According to Joseph M. Carrier and Stephen O. Murray,

Woman-woman marriage—in which one woman pays a brideprice to acquire a husband’s rights to another woman—has been documented in more than thirty African populations (O’Brien 1977: 109), including at least nine Bantu-speaking groups in present-day southern Africa and Botswana—Sotho, Koni, Tawana, Hurutshe, Pedi, Venda, Lovedu, Phalaborwa, Narene, and Zulu. In these groups, female political leaders are also common. These women chiefs rarely have male husbands (whether or not they have wives). Indeed, among the Lovedu, the queen was prohibited from having a male husband and was required instead to have a wife (Krige 1974)....

In East Africa, female husbands have been mentioned among the Kuria, Iregi, Kenye, Suba, Simbiti, Ngoreme, Gussim Kipsigis, Nandi, Kikuyu, and Luo. In Sudan, they occurred among the Nuer, Dinka, and Shilluk; in West Africa (particularly Nigeria) they existed among the Dahomean Fon, as well as the Yoruba, Ibo, Ekiti, Bunu, Akoko, Yagba, Nupe, Ijaw (O'Brien 1977: 110; Seligman and Seligman 1932: 164-165), the Nzema (Grottanelli 1988: 210) and the Ganagana/Dibo (Meek 1925, 1: 204-10). (255)

These reports notwithstanding, it is interesting that after a closer look, it becomes apparent that these marriages were not enacted for the purpose of sexual gratification as such; they were mere roles assumed by some women because of their status in society—female leaders for example. Evans-Pritchard describes among the Nuer, for example, how in spite of the fact that the female-husband married her bride just like a man would do, she got another male, usually a male relative or friend or neighbor, to beget children by her wife and to help with chores designated as masculine by society (Carrier and Murray 256). Max Gluckman goes on to acknowledge the existence of similar practices amongst the Zulu, but the female-husband usually gets but a male *relation* to get children for her (emphasis mine). Accordingly, Gluckman points out that these practices are weighty customs enforced by ancestral wrath and arise not from the need for sexual gratification, but from the importance of continuing the agnatic line, an important facet of most patriarchal cultures of Africa (Carrier and Murray 256). Carrier and Murray seem to emphasize this non-sexual dimension of woman-woman marriage when they also point out that in South Africa Venda women who had male husbands could also acquire their own wives by paying bride price in cattle just as the men did, but it is Hugh Stay who clearly puts the practice in perspective when he writes:

Women in a position of authority, such as petty chiefs or witch-doctors, who have been able to accumulate the necessary wealth, often obtain wives in this way, even though they may be themselves married in the ordinary way.... These women are really in positions of servants and are obliged to do all the menial work; they may be given to different men for the purpose of obtaining children, but these men, not having paid the *lobola* for them, have no legal rights over them or their children. (qtd. in Carrier and Murray 257).

On the other hand, the case of boy-wives seemed to have been practiced in different areas and reports indicate the practice of some form of sexual relationship. Among the Zande located in southwestern Sudan, northeastern Congo, and the Central African Republic, Evans-Pritchard, according to Stephen O. Murray, reports of homosexuality being indigenous and, in fact, not frowned at by society (Murray 26); a rather interesting observation. With the Zande, therefore, a male warrior could marry a teenage boy, but unlike the woman-woman marriage, the man-boy marriage comes to an end when the boy becomes an adult. The boy can then go out and get his wife, whereas the former husband goes on to marry another boy-wife. The boy-wife served his warrior-husband in many different ways, such as fetching water for him, collecting wood and kindling his fire, and carrying his shield for him when they travelled.

These exceptions notwithstanding, the African sense of marriage is largely that of a man to one or more wives; anything else is considered deviant and frowned upon terribly. However, with Westerners involved in these practices exiting the closets and talking about their rights in public, it is not surprising that Africa will follow suit, if these practices are ongoing on the continent, just as in many other areas where Western influence has been noticed. There are echoes in South Africa, already, of a lesbian couple struggling with the courts to legalize their union; a trend which, if it should succeed, will make South Africa the first African nation to legalize same sex marriages.

147. Are Africans pre-occupied with sex as one is made to believe?

On the contrary, Africans do not preoccupy themselves with sex as it is considered an extremely private affair and in some African cultures considered reserved mainly for procreation instead of the gratification of the senses; a preoccupation with sexual matters is therefore considered prurient and frowned upon. It is particularly interesting to encounter the writings of Westerners who write about sex in Africa as if Africans are animals who are always on heat and spend every minute of the day mating in public for them to watch and emerge with anthropological details about the sexual habits of this “species.” Alex Shoumatoff writes for example as he grapples with ideas about the transmission of AIDS in Africa:

For most Africans, sex is a matter of vigorous old-fashioned humping, often without foreplay, which means that there is insufficient lubrication, and the genitalia of both partners are therefore liable to abrasion. Some researchers have speculated that the duration of the sex act, and the *frottement*, or grinding, that the women of certain tribes are famous for, certain techniques like the *titikisha*, Swahili milling movement, and the *okuweta ekinoto*, the frenzied twisting of the waistline of Baganda women, may play a role. In other tribes, like the Tutsi and the Kikuyu, the woman is not supposed to move during intercourse lest she be thought of as a prostitute. (177)

For Shoumatoff, obviously, if foreplay does not consist of what he knows it to be—the aggressive yet mutual invasion of each other’s body with parts of a partner’s body and man-made gadgets, toys as they call them, about twenty minutes before intercourse, in ways some Africans may consider embarrassing and even dirty, because of their cultural beliefs—then it is not foreplay. No, sex is like a meal, the meal of the soul, cooked, served, and consumed differently according to cultural values, this fact needs to be respected instead of Westerners writing condescendingly about sexual idiosyncrasies in other cultures. “Humping” is hitherto a natural phase in the sexual act, but who would just jump on a sexual partner and begin “humping,” as per Shoumatoff?

No, sex in pristine Africa was respected and reserved for couples and mature members of society. The younger generation though, is again affected here by Western culture that has transformed sex into an everyday topic through pornography and anything else—fashion, sex-education and what have you, all of which are slowly being imported into Africa. Consider magazines on sale in the West, where virtually every magazine has a section that deals with sex in one way or the other; this is not the case in Africa. However, like a lot else that is Western, this disposition towards sex is creeping into the continent. Even then, sex is traditionally not a public matter in Africa, for which reason it is difficult for African parents to discuss matters relating to sex with their children, even today that the children are exposed to sex and similar notions through bookwork in school and the media.

148. Do men and women get married or they can just sleep with whomever?

In the past, virginity was the order of the day, and so parents did all to ensure that their children remained virgins until marriage, especially the bride. With all the pornography around these days, children who in the past would not have heard of sex at their ages are becoming experts on matters of sexuality. The result is that it is no longer uncommon to see couples cohabiting even though this is still greatly frowned at and is done at the expense of the girl who might never get an African man for a husband if it is known that she had cohabited with another man before, unless the man has been influenced by foreign cultures and he does not care. Most young men however, will not easily get married to a girl who is publicly known to have cohabited with another potential suitor, especially one that they know. This notwithstanding, young men and women sleeping around before marriage is a trend that seems to be more commonplace nowadays than it was the case in the past.

149. Is incest common in Africa?

Incest is a very serious offense in African worldview and so it is taboo. A person might grow and die and never hear of a single occurrence. Such offenders are usually ostracized from society by being driven out of the village, which in the past was their world, so to say. Robert Brain's words about incest among the Bangwa people of Cameroon, is typical for the peoples of Africa; his words reveal not only how rare incest is, but also confirm the nature of punishment meted out on the offender:

Incestuous relations between patrisiblings and father and daughter have been known and told to me. An actual case of father-daughter incest occurred leading to the ostracism of the man by fellow members of his community who refused to share food with him. A case of incest between patrisiblings resulted in the boy's banishment from the village; the girl was beaten and given a week's hard labour at the palace. When I asked why the girl was not sent away too they replied in a practical fashion: 'How can we ostracize somebody else's wife?' (59)

Incest is not common within African cultures as it is considered an abomination.

Sports

150. Do you play football in Africa?

Football along American lines is not played in Africa. A few missionaries from Great Britain tried introducing rugby in parts of the continent but it did not gain much steam in the face of soccer (globally referred to as football), which is the number one sporting activity in the world. Other sporting activities Africans are interested in are basketball, swimming, volleyball, handball, tennis, cycling, car racing, and other track and field events. Golf is gaining grounds among the rich, but one wonders if it could ever catch up with its popularity in the West even with the ongoing efforts towards sponsoring the game by some major companies.

151. Is there any game like “Catching the monkey?” I think I got that from Eddie Murphy’s “Coming to America.”

There is no such game as “catching the Monkey,” in Africa. In fact, I heard of it for the first time from that same movie also. I know that we have hunters who go out hunting monkeys, but that is not a game to them, as this is done during serious hunting expeditions, and it is certainly not called “catching the monkey;” unless it is all right to talk of an American game called “Catching the Deer,” since Americans love hunting deer, and more so for the fun of it than out of genuine need for deer meat.

Music

152. What kind of music do you listen to in Africa?

Africa is certainly the heart of rhythms. The music variety from the continent of Africa dwarfs the number of languages spoken on the continent and these run into hundreds. Each language belongs to a community and their rhythms vary depending on the occasion—war, hunting, love, birth, death, joy, sadness, religion, traditional and contemporary, etc. In addition to local rhythms, Africans also listen to music from all over the world. One can comfortably say

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the rhythms of the West will be found in Africa very easily, in addition to those of the continent itself, some of which have never been heard in the West.

One of the continent's most popular genres, Afrobeat, is growing stronger every day in the West, albeit after the death of the founding father—Fela Anikulapo Kuti, popularly known as Fela, of Nigeria. Afrobeat is a combination of African percussions and vocal techniques along with a mixture of various African musical influences: Yoruba music variations in the main, funk rhythms, highlife and jazz. The subject of focus has been politics primarily, along with any other issues that constitute a nuisance in society or are simply worthy of attention, since Fela was himself a socio-political maverick. Accordingly, if he was not lambasting an individual, Fela sang about corruption in government and society as a whole, the failures of the United Nations, Western influence in Africa, and women in society.

The African music scene is crowded with internationally recognized musicians with varied rhythmic sensations, so much so that it is simply unreasonable to attempt naming anyone in this sea of artistic giants. In any case, a few of the earliest names that paved the way to international recognition and stardom are musicians like the glamorous South African queen of songs, Miriam Makeba; the legendary saxophonist, Manu Dibango of Cameroon; the godfather of Afrobeat, and multi-instrumentalist, the late Fela Anikulapo Kuti of Nigeria; and the talented guitarist and vocalist, Franco Luambo Makiadi from the Democratic Republic of Congo and his other contemporaries like Tabu Ley Rochereau, and the late Dr. Nico. The works of these giants, and of so many other equally successful pioneers of African music, those deceased and those still living, coupled with numerous younger artists and groups, continue to bring freshness to an old, established, and rich arena—that of African music.

153. Are the instruments used by your orchestras the same as Western instruments?

The instruments used by African bands are indicative of all the influences with which the continent has come in contact; these bands embrace Western instruments and more. Western instruments,

accordingly, are a recent phenomenon on the continent of Africa, but music in Africa is as old as the people themselves. The result is that traditional African instruments are still very alive and are now being used along with Western instruments in existing westernized bands. Some of these African instruments, however, like the xylophone, and some rasps and rattles have been westernized, but there are others, like the hand piano, the tam-tam, and the *kora*, a sophisticated chordophone, which remain the same.

Technology

154. Are there computers in Africa?

Yes, there are computers in Africa, and people own personal computers and laptops just like anywhere else. However, the economic and administrative institutions are not yet as heavily computerized as is the case in the West. These computers are used by individuals and by the public and private sectors of the economy, I believe, to the chagrin of Peter Schwab who gives a rather insulting twist to Gate's appeal to his fellow technological billionaires that they donate money to the poor instead of trying to sell them their products. According to Schwab, Gate's appeal amounts to "...what could Microsoft conceivably gain from incorporating Africa into a world globalized network, when its people don't even know if they will survive another 24 hours? The answer, of course, is nothing" (127). It is only fair enough to reiterate the fact that this is meaning given Bill Gate's appeal by Peter Schwab. Schwab must be disappointed to find out that Microsoft and other technological ventures have harvested from Africa, Africa south of the Sahara in particular, as Microsoft products are sold, bought and used all around the continent. It is surprising that Schwab would think this way, even with all the billions the West has generated from exploiting Africa in every way possible ever since the first Westerners set foot on African soil. No, even with Africans not knowing whether or not they will survive the next 24 hours, Africa's oil, minerals, timber, and agricultural products, to name a few, are still carted out of Africa, sometimes under dubious circumstances, by Western ventures.

Schwab's interpretation of Gates' suggestion about Africa and globalization can be compared to somebody declaring that a senior be left to die in his home "unaided" simply because efforts to attempt saving his life after he has been diagnosed with a potentially fatal cancer might be fruitless. But how could it be forgotten that the incentive, of course, is profit and not philanthropy. And, since it is erroneously believed that no prolific business can be established in Africa, since indeed they all have to do with draining the continent, then Africa should be left to rot in her isolation. Great reasoning! Unfortunately then, or fortunately rather, depending on the whim of who the enquirer is, computers are also found in Africa even if in some parts children use cut-out cardboards to learn with, as indicated by Keith Richburg.

For purposes of educating the ignorant, it must be added here that globalization is not as new a trend as today's heirs to the thrones of global exploitation would like the world to believe. By 1995, Charles Keba, in Francis Nyamnjoh's *The Disillusioned African* had already isolated this practice in the hands of one of those, today, appropriately called "economic hitmen" courtesy of John Perkins. Keba writes to Moungo:

Perhaps no one is interested in real knowledge about Africa. No doubt I have met some so-called World Bank experts many times. But they have done most extraordinary things! Imagine someone sent to find out about livestock breeding in Africa. Once he arrives, instead of going to the rural areas where this breeding takes place in its most rudimentary form, he remains in the economic and political capitals, where he holds one political or business meeting after another – asking bureaucrats what livestock breeding in the country is like.. (Just like asking a monkey what life is like in the seal) When he is satisfied, he writes a report to which the invariable conclusion remains: *'Donc, pour répondre à la question si l'Afrique peut partir ou non, je peux, à travers mes études profondes dans dix pays Africains conclure sans faille que: L'Afrique est sure le point final de partir. Il faut alors renforcer l'aide économique, politique, technique et culturelle'* (Thus, to answer the question whether Africa is ready or not, I can confidently state, on the basis of in-depth studies I have carried out in ten African countries, that Africa is on the verge of taking off. Accordingly, it is

necessary to intensify economic, political, technical and cultural aid). And for such an expert conclusion, the World Bank gives him enough million dollars not only to preserve him for future research projects, but to enable him to live like an academic prince for the rest of his life. The more experienced he becomes, the more his subsequent studies are to be concluded before they are carried out. Perhaps you are unaware that many are the experts who go into the field with their conclusions in their briefcases. There are countless examples of this.... (translation mine 35)

Before 1995, and even the years documented by John Perkins in his *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, globalization started when the first explorers left their homelands in search of foreign markets and raw materials to feed the demands of their starving economies. Globalization, one might say, only metamorphosed into the next and most devastating stage by going “high-tech”—one flight across the world from continent to continent, puppet administrators installed and then conference calls with videophones are used to monitor the performances of puppet economic administrators around the globe to the benefit of world economic capitals. Africa cannot therefore be bypassed; her exploitation is only made more subtle by such claims.

There are computers in Africa, but just as is the case with cars, they remain very expensive and without credit facilities as can be found in the West, the African has to save and then buy his computer paying for it cash and at once.

155. Are there African cars in the market?

Not yet. Africa imports most of her cars from Japan and other European countries like France and Germany. As of present, there are only car assembly plants in some African countries like Nigeria and Egypt.

156. Is it true Africa is yet to be industrialized?

Africa is industrialized, but not to the extent of Western countries and those of Asia. This is as a result of colonial policies in Africa. While Europe was experiencing the agrarian and industrial

revolution, she was ensuring that Africa remained at the primary phase of the manufacturing chain—the supplier of raw materials and nothing else. This is the case because whereas new farming techniques were imposed on Africa as well as the crops to be grown, the technical aspect of the manufacturing process was never exported to Africa. In the meantime, Africa was denied the chance of evolving in any way by the practice of colonialism. Africans, during the colonial era, were encouraged and more often forced to continue the farming and harvesting of raw materials they really did not need, or the mining of valuable stones and metals, which were then exported to Europe where they were processed. Africa, as a result, remained largely unindustrialized compared to the rest of the world, since they were only permitted to till and mine but never let in on the “secrets” of transforming raw materials into finished products. The colonialist imposed their ways on Africa but held as tight secrets those that could transform Africans into rivals in any way. Accordingly, Africans remained at the primary level of every Western process imported into the continent by the colonialists. The industrialization of the continent is underway though.

157. Do you have television stations?

Yes, there are television stations and some as old as from the fifties. Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Ibadan was Africa’s first television station and it came into existence in 1959 as the Western Nigeria Television (WNTV). According to M.I. Egbon, “Television transmission began in Western Nigeria on October 31, 1959. This service which was initiated by a Regional Government was not only the first in Nigeria, but remains today the oldest in the whole of the African continent” (qtd. in Umeh 56). Today, however, there are modern TV stations in Africa that can be compared to any elsewhere in the world. The level of technological advancement, however, differs between different nations, with Libya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt being some of the most advanced. Again, depending on where one is, the reception is sometimes poor. Then there are fewer channels in many African countries, since the governments, which use it as propaganda machinery against rivaling political factions, are still monopolizing the television, in most cases. Although many governments are now beginning to relinquish this

chokehold on the media, especially on television, it is yet to gain grounds as a major business asset as is the case in much of the rest of the world.

Transportation

158. Are cars common in Africa?

Cars are not as common in African countries as in the United States, since not everybody can easily afford a car. These are very expensive foreign imports as of now because of the heavy-duty taxes levied on these commodities. This notwithstanding, even the very best cars around the world which are popular in different Western countries are found in most of Africa. Luxury cars, like the Mercedes Benz, are found all over the nations of Africa in disturbingly large numbers, given the unhealthy nature of most of these economies along with the number of people living in poverty. Cars can be said to be common, but not as in the United States with kids barely sixteen owning cars.

159. Is it true that Africans cannot afford cars?

This question can be understood and tolerated, like much else about Africa, because it certainly stems from the fact that not as many Africans have cars, unlike in the United States, for example, where even teenagers drive their own cars. But to claim that Africans cannot afford cars would be an unfortunate twist and exaggeration of the fact. The truth is that Africans can afford cars and do own cars, some of the most expensive models even, but like in other parts of the world, say parts of Asia and Europe, cars, generally speaking, are considered a luxury since not just anyone in society can afford to buy one. This is the case in Africa because, besides the fact that cars are imported, and so are more expensive because of the heavy taxes African governments impose on foreign goods, the method of paying for a car in Africa is different from what obtains in the United States for example. In the United States, on the one hand, all one needs is a good credit record, a steady job and salary so as to make agreed upon payments in a timely manner, and

he can drive a good car. This is made possible by the established credit system within the culture. So with a steady job and a good credit record (nowadays even, a bad credit score is no longer a deterrent factor) anyone can go to a car dealership and get a car on hire purchase. All that is required is that certain terms such as method of payment, the amount for each payment, taxes included, and the frequency of payment, be agreed upon and the “buyer” has a new or fairly used car of his choice in which to begin driving around. One cannot help questioning, therefore, why virtually everyone will not be able to have a car under such a system. In Africa, on the other hand, because of the political instability, which makes it hard for an established economic system to prevail, the one in need of a car has to pay for his car in cash before leaving the dealership with the vehicle—used or brand new. The idea of establishing a loan, which will take years to re-pay like in the U.S., is out of the question. If an African were to take a loan to buy a car based on his/her ability to make monthly payments, as is the case in the United States, for example, then owning a car would not be that big of a deal. After all, how many Americans, in contrast, can go to a dealership and put down complete payment for their cars before driving them out of the dealership? Because Africans pay in cash for their cars, except for the rich, buying a car becomes quite a feat; even then, cars are still all over the place, such that it would be ridiculous for anyone to claim that Africans cannot afford cars. Noteworthy is the fact that in every society, there are the haves and have-nots. Given the established circumstances surrounding purchasing a car in Africa, one should be wondering instead, how it is Africans can afford all the expensive luxury cars they own.

Worthy of note is the fact that Africans are brought up to live within their means and, at all cost, to avoid being in debt, whereas being in debt is, today, a *sine qua non* for survival in the United States. Take an African’s house, for example, or hut if you will, if it is his, and he is, most likely, not owing any person or organization for the building. At the best, he might owe a bank some money, which he borrowed when he ran out while building, and not some mortgage which he will continue to pay for the better part of his/her life. This is the case because Africans take some time to raise the money for their homes and then they begin building it slowly

until completion. In the process, should the need arise, they may take small loans here and there, which loan is immediately repaid within a year or thereabouts but the bulk of the money is from their private savings. It is the same with cars and other belongings.

One is left then to wonder what the situation in the United States would be like were citizens expected to pay cash for their cars or anything else they buy?

Utilities

160. Do you have electricity in Africa?

Yes, there is electricity in Africa, but it is very expensive; this is the case for a number of reasons. Firstly, most of these countries are still using hydro-electricity as their main source of supply. With the recent trend in global warming, the water level in most of the dams has fallen below expectations. This has led to shortages in electrical power, to the point that some countries now have to ration electricity. Another reason for the very high cost of electricity is the fact that most of the power supplying corporations have been privatized, and so are managed by Westerners who pay themselves exorbitant salaries simply because they are Westerners. Their African colleagues, some with better qualifications, are still underpaid comparatively speaking. Such high salaries, coupled with the fact that these Westerners are out to get as much out of the host countries as possible, lead to frighteningly high prices for utilities. For any flimsy reason, which would be managed otherwise in Europe, these Westerners, who themselves receive utility services for next to nothing, the French, as was the case in Cameroon for a long time, can hike utility prices and transfer the costs onto the natives without thinking about how it affects the population; the profits they ship back home. There is electricity in Africa, but it is frighteningly expensive.

161. Do you use electricity in Africa?

Electricity is a basic utility in Africa as it is in virtually every household around the world, but one thing is obvious about utilities in Africa—they cost too much for the average person to afford. One cannot help wondering how it is that electricity is so cheap in other parts of the world to the point that even toothbrushes run on the mains, while in Africa most families can barely afford to light their homes at night. Even though most of Africa is still depending on hydro electricity for power, a wonderful source, by the way, with hardly any harmful by-products, this is a utility that is incredibly expensive. The result is that in some African countries now, like Cameroon, electric power is rationed according to cities or neighborhoods, but the cadres in these power corporations have their homes lighted twenty-four hours a day for free, or next to nothing, compared to how much the ordinary person has to pay. The irony is that they do not seem to care that the rest of the people do not have this facility, as this is one more way of showing that they are “special human beings” on whom power and success are smiling—the “Ogre” or “big man” mentality in most African societies.

162. Do you bathe and drink from the same source?

Water is quite a problem in some parts of Africa where droughts are common, and yes some people do bathe and drink from the same source. But when that source is an open stream, people fetching drinking water know that they need to go further up stream to spots removed from where other human activities like laundry or swimming take place. Anybody bathing in a stream is seizing the opportunity to kill two birds with a single stone, since most people without the facilities would rather fetch water and use it for bathing at home. This is same for answering to other calls of nature; every compound has a toilet set aside for these things, even if they are outdoor facilities.

Men and Women

163. Are African men and women circumcised?

Generally speaking, rites, such as circumcision which marks the transition from adolescence into adulthood, are very common African practices and are of great importance. It is indeed rare to find uncircumcised African men. In the past, when rites of passage ushered boys into manhood, it was not uncommon to see boys as old as seven to about nine who were yet to be circumcised; other kids usually made fun of them.

The situation is different with women, as only some cultures encourage female circumcision. This notwithstanding, it is a practice that has gone on for hundreds of years and is still being practiced in some parts of Africa and the Arab world. Depending on one's roots, the motive behind the practice is presented differently. As Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf confirms, "Even within the same geographic locality, the nature of the practice, its justification, and the age at which it is performed differ vastly by ethnicity and class" (1). To some it is just tradition, a cultural, and arguably, a religious requirement, but opponents point out its life-threatening potentials, before highlighting it as a form of oppression of women, as it supposedly deprives them of the pleasures of sexual intercourse. Accordingly, female circumcision is a custom that has come under attack from adversaries who have called it all sorts of names before settling on "Female genital mutilation" (FGM), which, hopefully, echoes the monstrosity of this practice which, to these opponents, the word "circumcision" must have euphemized, mindful of this being a practice from Africa that, according to Western attitude and practice, is supposed to be presented as barbaric. This notwithstanding, where and when female circumcision was practiced, it was considered dignifying and it had a lot more cultural significance beyond just the pain inflicted and the sexual gratification detractors argue it tampered with.

Fadwa El Guindi's observation that in Europe and the United States female circumcision was practiced for medical and punitive reasons during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is indeed enlightening mindful of Westerner's (female) disposition towards the practice today (29). But then consider again, another revelation by El Guindi:

An Egyptian woman with whom I was having a conversation about female circumcision asked me pointedly: ‘had this [referring to the female genitalia] been your face, would you leave it as is? This question was startling; I had not previously connected a woman’s genitalia with her face. Her remark implies an analogy that raises a host of questions about the cultural meanings of female circumcision. It suggests that female circumcision is a cosmetic procedure for beautification, with the implication that it enhances female sexuality. The significance of the comment lies in the notion that the appearance of two distinct parts of the female body—in one cultural setting, a woman’s genitals, and in another, her face—can be subject to surgical alteration for the same purpose: beauty enhancement and sexual appeal. This notion alone flies in the face of the wisely held Western assumption, which is made especially by activist feminists, that female circumcision is performed to reduce female sexuality. (27)

In the light of this argument and Westerner’s attitude towards female circumcision, it seems one can conveniently talk of “breast hacking and implantation,” “butt mutilation and facial lacerations” etc. How words can change everything. In keeping with how cultural practices carry different values to different people, especially those within and those without the culture, Neal Sobania reports that in Kenya, for example, the government’s effort to eliminate female circumcision, thanks to Western demonization of the practice, is floundering:

The government has tried a number of responses including arresting the parents of girls who undergo the rite. The impact, however, has not been particularly effective yet because the passing of laws that change cultural practices must go hand in hand with a change from within the communities and from the people themselves. Such change, however, is typically slow. In part, this is because the peer pressure on girls is enormous, especially in rural areas. Those not initiated ‘properly’ find themselves shunned, taunted, and verbally abused. Some girls whose parents stopped them from participating are so afraid of being ostracized that they have gone so far as to threaten suicide. (151)

So, whereas male circumcision is almost the norm in Africa, female circumcision is kind of sporadic depending on where cultures which practice it are found. It must be remembered that in Africa, most practices have an elaborate historical context and are culture-bound instead of being just mere fads. Accordingly, when these practices are stripped of their historical and cultural values when being criticized and in some cases demonized, the whole exercise becomes misguided. “Female Genital Mutilation,” for example, is determined to be thus by detractors, but as El Guindi found out, it is beyond the male gender; for some women and cultures, it is spiritually fulfilling and a thing of beauty even, just like breast implantation, liposuctioning, some plastic surgery on faces and peoples’ back sides. The bottom line, after all is said and done, is that like anything else, there are people for and people against female circumcision, and not all African cultures oblige women to be circumcised.

164. Is it true that African men prefer women who are fair in complexion?

That is not necessarily the case as it varies from person to person and from culture to culture. The issue of complexion is a matter of choice; as varied as African men are, so varied too are the choices of what they admire in a woman’s complexion. Whereas there are some men who like fair-skinned women, there are African men too who adore women who are ebony in complexion, as they are considered very beautiful and “original” since there is no lotion that can darken the skin, whereas there are creams out there that can lighten skin color. It is hard again to be categorical here—every African man’s relish is his.

165. Are there white people—men and women—in Africa?

There are white people in Africa, and for very many different reasons. There is the settler population, some of whom are recent settlers, whereas others are the great grandchildren of adventurers who decided to stay rather than leave after their visit in search of wealth. This is especially the case in South Africa. Then there are sojourners, who are in quest of a different lifestyle, who have moved to Africa where they are permanently resident. Some love the

warmth that exists between human beings who are free and excited about greeting each other, unlike in most parts of the West, especially in the cities, where a neighbor might live for years without even knowing his or her next-door neighbor. A large number of Western women who got married to their African husbands when the husbands were studying in the West are also in Africa. There are other white men and women, like the Arabs too, who are business people and are in Africa to invest in one way or the other—bankers, oil companies, and those in the import and export trade. Yes, there are white people all over Africa.

166. Do women use veils when getting married in Africa?

This is another area where the meeting with the West has only made things more cumbersome for the African. The veil during weddings *per se*, is a typical Western wedding paraphernalia, but it is now used in Africa during Christian marriages. The point here is a question of what kind of wedding ceremony is taking place. Weddings in most African communities unfold in phases; there is first, the traditional phase of the wedding when the man officially asks the bride's family for her hand in marriage. Should things go well during this phase, which involves numerous stages, then the man and the woman are considered traditionally married. Amongst the traditional elders, those in both families, and within the traditional community, the two are at once considered a couple. But then, in order to qualify for the administration's recognition and so earn their attendant benefits due legally married couples—family allowances, housing allowances and the like—they have to present before a civil administrator and have their marriage "legalized." Even at this point, there is a third party that will still not consider such a couple married yet—the church. As a result, the man and the woman must again present before their religious authority—priest, pastor, or imam—as the case may be. Because of how long, tiring, and financially demanding these phases can be, some couples try to cut down on cost by carrying out the traditional phase first, and then they combine the civil and church phases on the same day. In this way, they eliminate the reception after the legalizing phase, which is now usually scheduled in the morning of the same day of the church wedding. There is then only one incredibly

huge reception later on in the day, after the legal phase, which takes between 8:00am and 10:00am, and the church wedding, which takes place between 12:00pm and 3:00pm, on that same day. It is during this church wedding, however, that women use veils. If, during the traditional phase, the woman has to be shielded, a loin-cloth is used or any other traditional piece of cloth.

167. Do women breast-feed children in Africa?

Breast feeding is regarded in Africa as one of the noblest roles played by the female gender. Women do breastfeed and it is no big deal. Because of the life-giving value of this gracious maternal role, it is done anywhere, anytime, and in the open even, without anybody seeing anything wrong with it. It is a common scene then, in Africa, to see a baby tugging away at its mother's nipples and swallowing mouthfuls of nourishing maternal breast milk without the mother trying to shield her breast. Accordingly, it is often baffling to a visiting African in the West who, before long, gets uncomfortably used to seeing scantily clad women all over the place, on television even, only for them to turn around and shield their breastfeeding babies in the name of decency.

In Africa, the length of time women spend breastfeeding their children differs from person to person and society to society, although women generally permit themselves to be guided by their medical personnel—doctors and nurses (traditional or Western). Generally, children breastfeed until they are just under a year.

168. Do African women also shield themselves from public view like Moslem women?

Some African women are Moslems and so follow what their religion requires of them; these would shield themselves accordingly. However, African women who are not necessarily Moslems are expected to dress decently, as it is a source of respect for them and their families; dressing otherwise is tantamount to declaring oneself loose. The times are changing though, and different generations are reacting to this differently because of foreign influences. This notwithstanding, an African girl who expects to be respected by her society knows how to dress when and where. Traditionally, a decent woman has to dress respectfully, and this means not presenting

herself inappropriately such that those areas of her body considered private are exposed. Today, respectable elderly women will shield their bodies as best as they can. It is not surprising, therefore, that they are mostly dressed in loin-cloths or in gowns and skirts that get as far down as their knees or thereabout. The young are greatly influenced by Western fashion and so tend to expose a lot more skin than their parents did, but, again, they know where and when to dress like this. Even with all the fashion statements around today, an African girl who exposes herself too much risks being seen as loose and irresponsible, even by her peers.

Africa's culture stresses decency in the way a woman covers herself up, the way she sits, the way she walks, and so on.

169. Can women in Africa marry more than one husband?

This has never been the practice, and so it is not done.

170. Do girls marry young in Africa?

In the past, when society was without the pressures of going to school, earning certificates, and then struggling to make so much money, a time when all that mattered was the son growing up learning to be a good father, and the daughter a good mother, not only girls, but boys also got married early. With the encroachment of Western lifestyles and values into the ways of the people, things have changed. For a while it changed first for male children who were seen as potential successors to their father's name and titles. It was not long, however, before negative human qualities in some sons came to the fore and some fathers started realizing that their daughters could still manage their families better after them even as wives to other men. Ever since some parents became disillusioned in some of their sons, they started giving their daughters the same opportunities that were before reserved only for the male children of the family. With this changing lifestyle—going to school for long years for example—girls and boys no longer get married early unless they think they are ready for the challenges of marriage. This requires being academically equipped and with a good job such that they can take care of themselves.

171. Is it true women do all the work in Africa?

In fact, Robert Brain writes of the men of the Bangwa ethnic group in Cameroon: “Bangwa free men did no work, their wives and their servants dealing with humdrum chores of farming, stockraising, housebuilding. The men fought and traded, always ambitious to become wealthy in ‘king-things’, titles, women and children” (13). The outsider is likely to say the women do all the work, but that would be an overstatement, if not a misrepresentation. In recent years, this belief has gather more steam even, because the African woman is also now bestriding two worlds—Africa and the West—and now has to go out to work way from her home and then return to her traditional chores as a wife. Before the invasion by the West, Africans had a traditional system in place whereby every member of the family had his or her own role to play to ensure the smooth running of the family, even though some men have been accused of doing nothing. These gender roles are so complex, but a summation will be attempted.

Like in the Bible, the father is the head of the household in Africa, even until today, and the traditional African woman has no qualms about this. The father, and usually the head of the household in Africa, has duties that entail overseeing the general welfare of the family as a whole by providing that which the mother, the next adult in the family, cannot provide—security, peace, housing, meat after hunting expeditions, clearing of the farm land, and all physical labor which called for extra physical strength as such, and the upholding of tribal values; the mother of the family provides cooked food for members of the family. If there are no grown-up children in the family, then she cleans the house, does the laundry and fetches water for the household. She then goes to market to sell the surplus from the family farm if she has to, and then she buys those things she, and her family need but which they did not produce; she also assists in tilling the farms after the men have done the clearing of the brush. Children, on their part, assist their mother in all that she needs help with. If they are reasonably grown up, then they are responsible for cleaning the yard, doing the dishes after meals, and fetching water from the stream. For these, the parents give the children a decent upbringing while also providing for them. Because of this tight family structure, African children can live with their

parents until they think they are ready to move out without being sent or hurried out of their family homes by their parents. And while living with their parents, they are never expected to pay rents or be financially responsible to the family in any way. They simply have to do their chores as children. A child can, out of his or her own volition, decide to be of financial assistance, but not because the father or the mother thinks it has to be done. This, on the other hand, is typical of civilized Western families, yet we are surprised when Western children stand and talk back disrespectfully to their parents or threaten to kill themselves. Simply because the law says someone is an adult at eighteen, does not mean that an eighteen year old must be able to look after himself or herself. We are again surprised that they turn around and accuse their parents of poor upbringing even in the face of material wealth, occurrences that very rarely happen in Africa. This is not to say African children cannot disagree with their parents, it is done, but in a most respectful manner, and usually through another elder who acts as a mediator. A child might, for example, disagree with his father through his mother or an uncle, as a sign of respect. At this point, the father calls in the child and discusses with him directly, as they strive to resolve the issue.

These are such noble values that no matter where African families find themselves, they cannot afford to part with them. Some African families do become very Westernized, when out in the West, but before long they fall apart. It is because these roles in a family have been mixed up, if not totally shunned in Western cultures that the sacredness of the family and the union of marriage have been reduced almost to a joke compared to what it is in Africa even today. But like with other cases in which Africa has listened to the West, or tried copying from the West, the cracks are already obvious on that marital bastion. African children in America today, for example, cannot understand why their mates who are eighteen and older have to hurry away from the protecting wings of their parents simply because the law says they are adults, only for them to get out there when they are not prepared to handle the grilling nature of life. These children are surprised that their counterparts in the West have to work two jobs to go to school and pay rents and car loans and the rest, when their mates from African and Asian homes

are still living with their parents, who buy or at least pay a reasonable part of the cost for their cars, feed them and house them for free. Some African or Asian families may appreciate a little contribution towards the mortgage, since it is the way of the land where they now find themselves, but this is not an unavoidable condition for their children living with them.

After decades of colonial indoctrination, it is not surprising that some of the ways of the West became part and parcel of daily life in Africa. The result is that today, for instance, the African woman too has to work to help with the very expensive nuances of the daily Western lifestyle that has become an extension of their traditional way of living. It is for this reason that to the outsider the African woman comes across as doing too much. This is particularly so to those Western women who hate cooking. To the average African woman, this is just part of her life as a mother, the life-giving force to the family as a whole. It is not surprising, therefore, that to the African woman true to the values of her people, unless she has cooked a good meal for her family she misses out on that joy which is triggered by her realization of her maternity in this manner.

It must be emphasized that she does this at least once a day, whether she is Chief Executive Officer or College Professor, unless her family requires otherwise. If she can afford it, given her busy schedule at her place of work, she gets a cook whom she supervises in every detail as to what is to be prepared for her family, and how it should be prepared. This is her maternity, her motherhood. African families love eating at home, they love eating their mother's or wife's food more than any other. It is for this reason that restaurant businesses, comparatively speaking, do not thrive very well in Africa as opposed to the West where whole families, on a rather regular basis, line up at fast-food and other restaurants to eat their daily meals.

So yes, the African woman is a very busy woman when her new roles, introduced by Western trends in her African society, are taken into consideration. This, however, is not to say she does all the work, as Western critics enjoy putting it, because when it is considered too much for the wife, her work load is usually reduced by the hiring of a servant who helps in running the home.

172. Can a woman work at any job she wants?

Traditionally, African societies have culturally defined social activities considered appropriate for different sexes, but these vary from society to society. As John C. McCall illustrates: “In the Gambia rice is grown primarily by women. In southern Nigeria, it is considered a men’s crop. Fulani women gain status by never being seen outside their compounds, while Asante women gain status by appearing in elegant dress at public events such as weddings and funerals” (184). These roles and expectations have been changing with time, depending on the different cultures that have come in contact with traditional Africa during the ages: Islam, Christianity and the like. These different forces have impacted upon Africa in different ways, sometimes bringing about drastic changes. It is accordingly difficult to make a sweeping statement about gender roles in Africa, as they change from society to society, depending on whether the families are Christians, Moslems, or traditionalist, as there are different expectations where different cultural forces are brought to bear.

In most African societies today, this complicated picture notwithstanding, it is safe to say a woman can do whatever job she wants to do. The truth remains though, that there are still certain jobs in the eyes of society that contradict the gentle and delicate nature of the female gender; a woman climbing a palm tree to harvest fronds for example. Men are taken aback when a woman is doing any of such jobs, but it is not as if anyone can tell the woman, outside the expectations of culture, “No you cannot do it.” I think in the West it was more like “...that’s not for a lady to do.” In fact, in Africa today a woman tearing across such barriers, when it has nothing to do with respecting or disrespecting someone else, is sometimes looked upon with secret admiration.

173. Do African women shave their bodies too?

Shaving the hair on a woman’s body is typically Western. In fact, in some cultures, African especially, hair on a woman’s body is considered challenging and sexy. Just as the black person’s hair on the head is different from that of the white person, so too the quality of the hair on the black woman’s body is different in nature from her white counterpart’s. It is short, tender, delicate, and closer to

her body, and most African men consider it sexy. A sprinkling of fragile hair on a woman's chest is also considered sexy by some African cultures. Culture! That's the bottom line. No, generally speaking, African women do not shave their bodies; they just nurse it as it is, the hair included, and their men love it that way.

Part Three

The Epilogue

As it is now obvious, so much of what is written or broadcast about Africa, today, like before, is, to say the least, insulting. Westerners, who write thus, give the impression their cultures are perfect and have never faced the problems some African nations are facing today, especially in the area of politics—the main source of Africa’s problems—and this is the case because a foreign system of government has been imposed on Africans. But a look at political activities in the West today and this portrait of a perfect political system is at once laughable. The question remains then if this disposition displayed towards Africa by these writers and media men and women is just plain bad faith or ignorance of one’s own history as one cannot help wondering what the French revolution was about, and what the American War of Independence was about. These Western writers seem to have forgotten that Germans had to exterminate some six million Jews just to grease their egos. Yet these are the same Westerners who today ridicule and damn African countries for grappling with conflicts ensuing from Western values—politics, religion, capitalism, and other isms—exported and, more often than not, imposed on Africa in the name of civilization. It is conveniently forgotten that some of the greatest atrocities in human history were brought about by the West: The Trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, World Wars I & II, the holocaust, and the likes. If anyone feels angry that these things are being mentioned in this light, then consider how Africans feel when Western writers strive to dwarf each other in their efforts at insulting Africa and Africans by presenting the culture of the latter as uncivilized if not exotic according to Western standards. Yet the truth remains: what is material affluence and sophistication when the mind remains small and the soul purposeless?

My goal has been to enlighten, in particular, that Westerner who is not necessarily an African scholar, about the continent of Africa. This was deemed necessary because of the distorted and equally distressing portrait of the continent that has been painted in the West for ages, highlighting Africa as a sinkhole of anomy and decadence distinguished by backwardness, the last quality being, of course, the product of that illusion that non-Western cultures

are backward. As already established, a certain condescending attitude came into Western outlook towards Africa, especially because of the slave trade, as many tried in vain to defend this historically exclusive act of barbarism by branding Africans subhuman, which implied it was alright to do the terrible things the “civilized” were doing to the “uncivilized” since the latter were not exactly human. The result is that from then, hitherto, almost anything has been said about Africa and accepted as factual, but some Westerners, for quite a while now, are beginning to accept that their peoples have always approached Africa from a flawed perspective—usually racist and bias. Although their focus is African politics, the truth of Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz’s observation as they try to refresh the approach of Western Africanist to Africa is far reaching:

The question of modernity is at the heart of our appreciation of the nature of identity in the African context. The belief that modernization is predicated on the development of a particular form of identity – broadly Westernization – has affected our perception of what is happening in Africa today. Our analysis of politics on the continent has often rested on falsely dichotomized perceptions of African identities. We have either tended to think of Africans in terms of a ‘universal’ notion of citizenship, whose sense of (political) identity would in due course conform to that of the West. Or we have been inclined to see Africans as entirely dissimilar, other: individuals whose ‘traditional’ notion of self made ‘modern’ politics virtually impossible. (49)

They go on to point out:

But our dilemma has been self-inflicted. It is our own narrow view of modernity which has constrained our understanding of African identities. We have confused development and Westernization, thus making it difficult to grasp the singularity of what is taking place on the continent.... (50)

The outcome has been a generation of Westerners, especially, whose knowledge of the continent of Africa is, to say the least, alarmingly misleading if not mediocre. To this unfortunately misguided population, Africa is the dark continent, the heart of

darkness, the heart of evil, the heartbeat of backwardness, the other continent of yore where beast and “human beings” are so closely related, at the very least as rivals if not peers and accomplices. Certainly disillusioning to the African when he or she visits the West, yet how very true it is, that this is the picture of Africa which even those with the means to do better, by telling the truth, love to promote. One can only wonder the cause of this bent in a civilized people’s character and disposition.

With goals best known to them and their enterprises, so-called experts have lambasted, ridiculed, damned, condemned, and attempted to ignore Africa to no avail, as their nations keep coming back to the continent for one reason or the other—raw materials, business, military bases, political allies etc. This notwithstanding, that which is important here is the fact that Africa’s diversity renders her volatile to attacks to which, as devastating as they are, a section of the continent can easily be found somewhat guilty. Achebe has put it appropriately through Ogbuefi Akuebe, “whatever tune you play in the compound of a great man there is always someone to dance to it (*Arrow* 113). Maybe this is why Africans themselves have been slow to react to all the sloth heaped on the continent by outsiders who, in the main, barely know anything about Africa. Whatever the case, it is simply wrong and dishonest for all those who claim to be educationist or story-tellers to approach Africa with the disgust they have always displayed as they end up coming across as if Africa, a huge continent, is one country with conflict, crime, sickness, poverty, etc, as characteristics unique to this “country.” As current world trends are revealing, this is not true; socio-economic problems are common problems faced by even the most stable nations. Like I have often said, theirs is the harvesting generation, and so these Western educationists, journalists, writers and the likes, are barely familiar with all that their forefathers did and went through to plant in the fields of time and history from which they are today harvesting socio-political theories and practices for survival. Beyond this, however, remains that almost pathological craving in some Westerners to damn Africa, as if it is the only means to make themselves feel good and successful in their own way of life. Accordingly, I have come to realize, thanks to my experience as a victim, that hate, usually in the form of stereotyping, discrimination, intolerance—race, sex, class—and otherwise, is, most

likely, an outward manifestation of an inferiority complex, a feeling of inadequacy, remorse, and even a yearning for unrequited attention, group or personal, which, overall, generates a sense of insecurity that could be false, but which as a result engenders a negative affinity manifested as disgust, aggression, disapproval, or unprovoked anger towards the target.

Many who have written about Africa have come to Africa already prejudiced by all the bias doctrines they have been subjected to about the continent from when they could begin understanding the sounds and letters. Accordingly, most Western visitors to the continent of Africa come there in search of the West in Africa, or that other Tarzan world they grew up on, instead of arriving with mental and emotional blank boards for Africa to write on. The result of this is a people who visit Africa with preconceived notions of Africans being at a biological stage which is as unfortunate as it is dysfunctional: they have simply failed to complete their metamorphic cycle into human beings along the lines of skin color and “modernization” after Western dictates. This will certainly change if an objective and therefore authentic history and civics of Africa and the world are taught Westerners; that is, if they could just be given the truth about themselves and the world. If this can be done, then the children will come to understand, unlike their predecessors, that Africans are a people with their own worldview into which chaos was spun by Western socio-cultural coup plotters who until today have refused to acknowledge Africa’s uniqueness as they go on urging Africans to become what they are not culturally and historically. Alas history, even knowledge as a whole, is being written with a bent towards presenting one people as the ideal, the center of all that humankind has achieved, and the rest as nonsense, peripheral beneficiaries of the former’s largesse. Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz present the other extreme, which is the lowering of analytical standards designed for Africa:

...it seems to be the enduring fate of Africa to be ‘explained in terms which are ahistorical as to be risible – a lowering of analytical standards which we would reject out of hand if it were applied to the societies in which we, in the West, live. Would we, for instance, explain the conflict in Northern Ireland solely in terms of ‘ancestral tribal hatreds’ or political scandals in France exclusively in terms of ‘the politics of the belly’? (xviii)

To judge others by alien and usually irrelevant standards to the victim is to be wrong from the very beginning, unless the goal was not intended to be objective as is most often the case when the focus is Africa, especially Africa south of the Sahara.

It is my hope that, in a way, after reading this book, the reader has come to realize that Africans are a people whose lives have been made more complex by their encounter with the West, which is ahead in terms of global economy and so claims faultily though, as the West seems to be learning today, that Western standards are *the* standard. There are other cultures with values that they cherish more, or at the very least that work for them better than what the West has to offer. This realization will eliminate a lot of the unnecessary conflicts characteristic of the world today. If Westerners can appreciate and accept these truths, then they will sooner or later realize that there is no need to misrepresent another people and their culture, as all it does is maintain an awkward local population that exudes the true essence of ignorance when it comes to affairs of the world. Beyond these misrepresentations and misperceptions, there will always be, as a result, a civil encounter each time people from different racial backgrounds come together, instead of that suppressed hostility that can still be felt around today because one group vainly and erroneously considers itself superior to another even with similar bodily organs that perform exactly the same role; it is not as if those who consider themselves superior are living without the need to eat. Again, without these unnecessary complexes, the new African immigrant population in many parts of the world would feel better welcome, as is the case with Westerners in Africa, and their services will better benefit their new settlements. This will be the case instead of the frustration today experienced because many Westerners erroneously consider African immigrants uneducated and hostile and so immediately antagonize innocent people in many different ways like simply not being friendly, to expecting Africans to prove themselves twice to be valued and appreciated; this obtains in places and disciplines experiencing a greater African influx. Oh yes, there are Westerners resident all over Africa, some as citizens of different African countries, and there are different Western governments with deeply vested interests in parts of Africa, just in case one is thinking "...but why don't they

stay in Africa.” Again, it was the invasion of Africa by Western adventurers, and the pilfering of Africa’s wealth which was then carted overseas that subsequently led to the Western exodus now taking place. Why is man complaining of being overwhelmed by bees when he first invaded the bees’ hive?

Africans are a people with their own ways and standards, which in most areas conflict with Western socio-economic and political thought which have been imposed on the former and resulting in chaos. This is not to say Africans are incapable of co-existing or managing their own affairs such that they can develop, the problem is that these are all values set by people who know very little, if anything outright, about Africa. Africa is certainly not the West, certainly not with a population that communicates in over a thousand languages, not with a population that believes in strong ties with their ancestors even while passing for Christians and Moslems, not with a population some of which believe in and practice witchcraft in almost every facet of their lives, not with a population that refuses to be individualistic after the ways of the West, and certainly not with a geography that is hilly, warm (even hot), rainy and without the extreme weather conditions of the West. Discover Africa for yourself if you can, else I must sound clichéic—take whatever Westerners give you about Africa with a pinch of salt. Even some of the very objective Westerners writing about Africa come from certain perspectives mainly, and are out to prove certain theories only, and so cannot be considered thoroughly effective in terms of the culture and identity of the continent of Africa; this is a fit made more challenging by Africa’s diversity.

Accordingly, whatever the case, given current trends, in so far as the news and so-called knowledge and facts about the world and its peoples are structured and flavored by biases—racist, sexist, religious, and similar forces—they continue to spell the failure of “humandom” reflected in the barbaric image of *that other* that has been painted under the influence of these doctrines. In the same vein, to continue believing and clinging intentionally to fallacies in reasoning and the presentation of others’ values and ways, since the sum total makes one to feel good about oneself and one’s ways and values, especially, is to best portray one’s knowledge and awareness of one’s inadequacies.

Humankind needs to grow beyond material into spiritual civilization, and the world would be a better place. Africa and her sons and daughters—wherever they are in the world today, and irrespective of their nationality—are good examples here. Consider that all the atrocities visited on this people notwithstanding, even when capable of inflicting it, because they have after all been able to turn the tide, have refused to exact vengeance. Their leaders have been able to reason with them that revenge serves no purpose, and that it is a better world when people respect each other for who they are instead of fanning illusions about superiority and similar nonsense: Jomo Kenyatta did it in Kenya, Nelson Mandela did it in South Africa. One cannot help thinking “how Christ-like!” only to remember those who brought Christianity to Africa and what they seem to stand for.

The world is vast and richly diverse in every way, and until its varied values and resources are recognized, cherished, celebrated, and exploited for the benefit of mother earth and humankind as a whole, humankind will remain tormented in every way. It is immature and simply wrong, therefore, for the practitioners of any one culture to believe that their culture is, or should be the standard. Such perpetrators would spare the world so much trouble by freeing themselves of such illusions if only they remember that culture is the consequence of an environment, its attendant events—natural and supernatural—and the resulting psychology and behavioral patterns which emerge in an effort to adapt and survive within the said space. Culture will always have unique, sometimes strange and even bizarre flavors distinctive to particular environments. It would be a better world were this simple fact grasped and appreciated, as it would purge out so many distressing attitudes and complexes today responsible for the destabilized social order of the world.

Notes

1. A quote from Bovin shows the racist and condescending attitude of British media towards WoDaaBe men's self-care which, in fact it would seem to me, is hardly different from what Western men do. The difference lies in the diction they use in describing similar activities in other cultures, especially those of Africa, which Bovin is convinced they have been "precoded" to consider exotic all the time:

"...an obsession with male beauty and adornment"; the WoDaaBe are "obsessively vain and spend hours making themselves up to look (undeniably) beautiful"; "joining the WoDaaBe at party-time when it is the menfolk who primp, preen and express their passion for personal adornment"; "Don't ask 'Who is a pretty boy then?' If you're among the WoDaaBe nomads of Africa: they all are and spend more time on their make-up than Michael Jackson!"; "A strikingly beautiful (and suitably vain) people, they eke out an existence on the West African scrub, cleaving to strong social traditions and vivid courtship, face-painted...priming and pouting." (93)

This is a classical illustration of the biblical lament about people who are quick to perceive the mote in others' eyes but ignore the wooden beam in theirs. I will try to sound like these Pharisees as I juxtapose their activities against those of the WoDaaBe. Imagine the English media, of a people once so vain it was said the sun does not set on nor had nature itself ascertained the bounds of their empire, accusing the WoDaaBe of vainness simply because they paint themselves and try to look good, a practice found in every culture on earth. Yet, English men, so hyper about being prim, have come up with "civilized" gadgets for priming and preening themselves with superior results than the WoDaaBe, but I think it does not matter here because their way is civilized. English men spend time everyday with pieces of metal glued to a handle with which they scrape off all the hair from their faces, which they first of all must paint white to facilitate the scraping process. To those with less fear for hair, they simply scrape the hair into less potent shapes of their choice. Their women are worse; their fear for hair is so strong that they have to scrape off every single strand from their entire body by any means possible even if it means applying some gooey substance on their bodies which they rip off painfully after every few tedious minutes, with all the hair stuck to it. Beyond their chins, the men use the same gadget on their head, inserting smaller versions into

their ears and nostrils all in an attempt to eliminate the hair in all these places. These people have an unparalleled fear for hair in their culture. After dealing with the hair on their faces, the men, to please and attract their women, apply some kind of wild but sweet smelling liquid they gather from flowers, leaves, and certain spices, on their bodies. The men, like their women, pay particular attention to the state of their mouths also. They scrape their teeth and gum with strange quills attached to the end of a short thin stick, to which they apply a certain substance reputed for its cleansing ability. They shove the quills in and out, in and out for a length of time, and then rinse their mouths with water and other medicinal liquids recommended by their herbalists for the wellbeing of their mouth. This is of particular importance to these men because of their strange habit of always sticking their tongues into their women's mouth every now and then as a sign of affection. In the same vein, these people have special sticks for prying loose strands of meat from the spaces between their teeth after each meal; some use thin ropes which they run in and out of the spaces between their teeth just to make sure nothing is left there that could give their mouth a foul smell when it begins to decay. Being prim is so necessary to these people such that after their mouth, they pay others to spend time scraping, trimming, and waxing their finger and toe nails for them. Painting their bodies is also a fad amongst them, especially the young, although some of them look down on the practice. Expert priests with the right incantations bore holes in virtually every part of their bodies, to which they attach pieces of metal for good luck and other similar beliefs. These priests also specialize in using sharp metallic objects, which they repeatedly dip into black ink, for drawing all kinds of wild patterns chosen by the devotee, on different parts of their bodies. Their women love these designs on their back just above their buttocks; they claim it puts their men in the right mood for sex, their main way of convincing a partner of the love one has for the other. Most interesting is this people's love for the sun god whom they spend long hours worshipping whenever the sun emerges. The men and women are always found by the sea, during these strange worshipping sessions, completely naked or with only a piece of cloth covering their genitals, as they show off their bodies in praise of the sun god. They are happy too if their bodies turn out burnt by the sun as it is a sign the god has answered their prayers. They claim this life style is indicative of being civilized and they believe deeply that anyone who fails to practice it is doomed; they soon begin developing strange discoloration of the body along with certain dark patches: the beginning of problems as a result of the curse from the neglected sun god.

How does a culture like that of the English come across when presented thus, and how backward and ignorant I feel writing in this manner. Yet, this is what the West loves to do to the cultures and countries of Africa: present great cultures as exotic and backward instead of different.

2. President Barack Obama's economic pep talk in Ghana to Africa as a whole is a good example of how complex Africa's predicament is; it cannot just be taken at face value because there are many forces working in the background. With good intentions, President Obama urged Africans on by reminding them that their future is in their hands, but blamed them for lagging behind by pitting Kenya's stagnation, as an example and comparatively speaking, against South Korea. He pointed out that at one time both countries had the same per capita income, but today South Korea has evolved into a successful economy whereas Kenya remains poor. This analogy, in an effort to spur by blaming, is typical of the plight of African countries. Such a perspective takes a swipe at the broad picture only, neglecting the role played by strategic undercurrents usually kept away from the public by the powers that be. President Obama failed to realize that South Korea did not start off on a level politico-economic field with Kenya. Whereas South Korea was developing under a dictatorship, Kenya, like many other African countries was under a Western chokehold which was demanding multi-party democracy as a *sine qua non* for loans, whether the local political climate was ready for this or not. Even more unparallel to the South Korean situation, international monetary organizations were dictating to African nations how to spend the loan money given them, even as African leaders and political scientists, like the late Claude Ake of Nigeria, complained that spending as spelled out by these organizations would not serve the interests of these African nations. On the other hand, South Korea was able to adopt policies relevant to her economic needs. African countries were, for example, asked to do away with marketing boards and guaranteed prices for farmers' products, eliminate subsidies to farmers while also greatly reducing tariffs on food products. Accordingly, imported food costing next to nothing from Western countries whose governments were and are still subsidizing farmers flooded African markets, ruining the once stable economies of these nations which had not only been self-sufficient in food crops, but were exporting food even. How was such unfair competition put in place, supposedly by Western experts of economic trends, to help Africa's progress? Given this scenario typical of dealings with Africa from the

earliest beginnings, billions given as aid does not help African countries in any way because, to begin with, the policies being put in place were not founded on experiences by African countries but by Western experts using their native experience instead. Try a polar bear living in the tropics! Again, because the billions supposedly given to Africa as aid is spent by African governments trying to neutralize the economic disequilibrium caused by the application of alien policies imposed on them by the international monetary organizations, there is no progress made whatsoever, yet African countries sink further in debt as the loans are already garnering interests and at interesting rates. The results are obvious and once more news headlines in the West scream of how Africa has proven its inability to make any progress, but nobody elucidates the bad hand the West is always dealing Africa. Very painful and hypocritical is the portrait of a philanthropist that these monetary sharks brandish to the world while deliberately running Africa aground by maintaining her permanently dependent on international monetary organizations and other Western “donors.” No, Kenya and South Korea did not take off from the same level ground nor were the rules of the game the same for each nation. Martin Khor confirms my take:

...any comparison between the developments in Africa and East Asia must take into account that most African countries were unfortunate enough to come under the influence of World Bank and IMF [International Monetary Fund] conditionalities, whereas East Asian countries did not and were free to adopt their own policies.

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Characteristically, Africans in any Western country are asked so many different questions about “Africa,” as Westerners love to refer to the many countries that make up that huge continent, as if Africa were a single nation state. So one begins wondering why it is that Africans, on the other hand, do not refer to individual European countries as “Europe” simply, then the trends and consequences of stereotyping begin setting in just as one is getting used to being asked if Africa has a president, or if one can say something in African. It is some of these questions that Emmanuel Fru Doh has collected over the years and has attempted answering them in an effort to shed some light on a continent that is in many ways like the rest of the world, when not better, but which so many love to paint as dark, backward, chaotic, and pathetic.

“This book deals with an interesting but also painful topic: the stereotyping of Africa in the West, notably in the United States of America. This is a laudable initiative... a timely and courageous effort to deal with long-standing stereotypes in the West.”

DR PIET KONINGS, SOCIOLOGIST, AFRICAN STUDIES CENTRE LEIDEN

“This book is a must read as it addresses questions too often thought of but afraid to ask by so many. Emmanuel Fru Doh’s writing is riveting as it opens the minds and hearts of men and women who truly are seeking an understanding of what ‘is’ African as interpreted by Africans. This work is honest, authentic and forthright in all of its accounts on how stereotypes of Africa have been applied; moreover, misapplied through excessive and purposeful distortions by the West.”

**DR ALVIN L. KILLOUGH, CULTURAL ECOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGIST,
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“Stereotyping – the production and consumption of frozen and often negative images and representations of others – are a feature of every society and encounter. This meticulous and well documented compilation of Western stereotypes about Africa, brings to the fore the element of power that gives life, visibility and legitimacy to the prejudices of some over those of others.”

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